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How to Improve Your Conversation

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How to Improve Your Conversation

An Aid to
Social and Business Success

BY
GRENVILLE KLEISER



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PREFACE

THE purpose of this book is twofold: to stimulate fresh interest in the vital subject of good conversation, and to offer some practical suggestions for self-instruction.

Paradoxically, conversation in its best form, is informal and spontaneous. It appears to ignore rules and regulations when it is really observing the best traditions. The author's chief desire is that this treatise shall contribute something to the general improvement of daily speech.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Miss Helen Leys for practical assistance in the preparation of this book.

GRENVILLE KLEISER

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I

Value of the Art

How to Improve Your Conversation

I

VALUE OF THE ART

CONVERSATION is one of the most precious of the arts. Without it, no man can really know his fellows; but because we have grown too busy or too lazy or too self-conscious, we have substituted for the polished speech of our forefathers a meaningless jargon, consisting of not more than some hundreds of words, in which a few overworked phrases and epithets are made to do duty for all occasions. We talk, we chatter, we gabble; but we do not converse.

It is strange that we neglect this art, as we undoubtedly do. It is as if a man, living alone on an island from which he could communicate with the mainland only by means of a bridge, neglected to keep that bridge in reasonable repair. Little by little it would collapse and he would become completely solitary. Well, each of us lives alone, in the

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island of his own nature, girt about with the great sea of space; but we have a bridge by which we may reach the minds of our fellow men—the bridge of conversation.

Some men have neglected their bridge; it has fallen away to a mere plank or two, a frail structure to which only their intimate friends will trust themselves, knowing, as it were, the weak places to avoid. Others have a bridge, solid enough, but narrow and dull, with a high wall at each side that completely blocks the wider vision—the wall of Prejudice; and a few—a very few—have an attractive bridge that allows free communication with friends and strangers, and displays wide and wonderful vistas over the unsailed seas of thought.

Metaphor apart, conversation is, of necessity, of paramount importance to mankind. No doubt we can maintain a certain amount of intercourse with others without employing this medium, but it is not natural for man to do so for long. We all know that to remain silent in the presence of others is a sign of enmity, of stupidity, or of great and true friendship; but most of those we meet are not enemies, or idiots, or intimate friends. The men and women we meet in the course of our normal lives are usually acquaintances—those with whom we wish to have a certain amount of intercourse

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which may eventually produce real intimacy or affection, if we can, in the real sense of the phrase, get to know them and allow them to know us. And we can do this only by the spoken word. All expression of ideas, of humor, of pleasure, of indignation, of any emotion that we all feel, must, in ordinary life, depend upon our powers of conversation.

"It is very certain that sincere and happy conversation doubles our powers"; Emerson wrote, "that, in the effort to unfold our thought to a friend, we make it clearer to ourselves, and surround it with illustrations that help and delight us. It may happen that each hears from the other a better wisdom than anyone else will ever hear from either. . . . (Speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel. It is to bring another out of his bad sense into your good sense. You are to be missionary and carrier of all that is good and noble."

There are two quite distinct types of social conversation; there is the talk one generally hears—talk that tells you nothing, that expresses almost nothing, using hackneyed phrases that rob it of the last traces of interest; and there is the talk that really gives you something new—that admits you into the true mind of the speaker, that brings to you new ideas and stimulates you in every way. To be in

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the company of any man or woman who talks really well is the greatest delight; it is certain that we could meet very many more such persons if we were not cut off from them by the two great barriers of reserve and self-consciousness, either on their part or our own.

We are nearly all afraid to talk at our best. We believe that if we say what we really feel about questions of art, of religion, of politics, of ethics, of beauty, our friends will set us down as "highbrow" or hysterical. We are afraid of seeming conceited if we talk well; and so we lose the power of expressing ourselves even if we would. Quite deliberately we cut ourselves off from worth-while communication with the minds of our fellow men; and they do the same as regards ourselves. Each withdraws into his shell; his ideas become stiff, rigid, rusty from want of use. We misunderstand each other; we become self-absorbed, self-centered. But soon we grow tired of our own company and wish for other comradeship; and then we find that we have now no power of reentering into these delightful, inspiring relations with our fellows: we have forgotten how to do it!

Nor is this mental isolation the only, or the worst, effect of the inarticulate lives that many of us lead. We cannot, however much we would, express our

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feelings adequately and appropriately even when it is most necessary to do so. Our unaccustomed tongues hesitate and stumble; we cannot give words to our pleasure or even to our affection; and the result is—quite naturally—that we are often misunderstood. We are put down as dull and stupid, or even as cold and heartless, by those who think they know us. We cannot tell them our feelings—and how are they to learn of them? They misinterpret our silence. Is it not natural? And we, even tho we realize the state of things, and know that the remedy lies in our own hands, have become too set in our ways to alter. We have lost the power of saying what we feel.

The man who is in this position loses more than anyone can accurately estimate. To revert to our metaphor, he is an absolute castaway on his island. His bridge, his one chance of communication with his neighbors, is gone, and he is cut off from the very necessities of mental life—from fresh food for thought, from stimulation, from the warmth of comradeship; and he is cut off, too, from much that makes life worth living—from many intellectual pleasures, from friendship, even from affection, sometimes; to say nothing of such pleasant attributes of life as respect, success and fame.

He knows, and is known by, no one; the result

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is that not only can he not develop the best in himself, but he frequently fails to help other people. For the man who can express himself readily and well can often be of real service to others. He can advise, and can, by the power of his persuasive tongue, make his advice attractive. He knows how to express the sympathy that most people so often feel and dare not put into words; he can take his part in an argument; he can give pleasure by his wit, can delight by his happy phrases, charm by his descriptions and amuse by his humor.

It may be argued that conversation is, after all, only a side-line, as it were, a pleasant adjunct to social intercourse; that it is not, therefore, of great importance to one's professional or business career. This is only partly true. There are occasions when what you say, and how you say it, may mean the turning-point in a career.

Take, for instance, the man who is seeking some new position and has an interview with the head of a department or firm. Naturally he will be ready with all the facts about himself and his previous work that are likely to be asked for; will be able to state what are his qualifications for the post. But is this all? Yes, it is probably all that will be definitely *asked* of him, but there is another, and often overlooked, element which is destined to play an

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important part in the result of this interview. The vital yet intangible factor of personality will assuredly be taken into account by the prospective employer.

This has not much to do with the cold facts of what the applicant has done in the past, with the weightiness of his testimonials or the value of his specimens of work. The general impression that he creates upon the receptive mind of the observant executive is of paramount importance. For the business man has usually to sum up and label his man, as it were, at one short interview; to compare him with perhaps a score of other applicants. It is not an easy task, and every factor that can help in rightly appraising his man must be taken into account. So the executive makes a point of marking how the applicant comports himself, particularly how he speaks—what he had to say and how he says it. If he expresses himself clearly, confidently and effectively, so much the better for his chances. Further, his choice of words alone will go far towards indicating his general education and culture, the amount of his reading and worldly experience. It will also be apparent to the employer whether or not the applicant has the power of persuasion (so essential in a business man), and also what is the extent of his resourcefulness and imagination.

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All these things are far more likely to be gleaned indirectly by the employer, in the course of this all-important interview, than by mere questioning. They will go far towards influencing the final selection, so that the man with halting, weak, truncated powers of conversation will stand little chance. His qualifications, intrinsically, may be good; but since he is unconvincing and lacking in assurance, he is eliminated from consideration.

"As soon as he opened his mouth, I knew that he was . . ." etc., is a comment often passed upon some person. To judge anyone on such slight evidence, it might be argued, is unsound; but there is much wisdom in this method.

A stranger speaks. Hardly looking him over, you know more or less what manner of man he is. Even an uneducated person instinctively exercises this judgment.

What tone or level of conversation should one adopt when speaking with a person of a social or cultural status evidently either superior or inferior to one's own? This is a question that often arises. Should one remain absolutely natural and speak as one is accustomed to speak with equals, or should one consciously adapt himself to the standards of his hearer?

It is difficult to lay down hard and fast rules, but

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generally speaking it is well to endeavor, while preserving a natural demeanor, to place oneself as far as possible on the plane of the other person. If, for instance, you are speaking to a working man, talk to him in language he will understand, neither lowering yourself to any display of vulgarity, nor yet holding yourself aloof in a frigid vanity. In other words, try to make whomever you are conversing with feel at home, at ease in your company. This will not only render the conversation mutually pleasanter, but will raise you in his estimation.

Should you be talking to a person whom you know to be far above you in education and station, there is no occasion to assume airs or try to ride the high horse in your speech. Such maneuvers would immediately be detected, and instead of raising you in the estimation of your companion, would merely win you silent contempt.

Owen Wister, in his book on Roosevelt, says: "After all, good society is the best invention of mankind." And good society is dependent almost wholly on conversation.

It is noteworthy that a person who has not devoted any attention to conversation as an art, or even realized that it is a subject for serious study, is clearly aware when he or she is in the presence of a poor talker—a bore. Everyone occasionally

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finds himself in the company of a garrulous individual who talks incessantly, who dominates the conversation without giving others the chance to utter a word, and who imagines (because of their silence) that he is vastly entertaining. Such persons are most awkward to associate with—and it is often positively painful to have to remain in their society. The only good they do is to cause one secretly to vow never to fall into the same wearisome habit.

What steps, then, should a man take who wishes, on all accounts, to become a good talker? To begin with, what exactly is a “good talker”? There is, of course, the somewhat limited meaning in which one would say that Doctor Johnson or Burke was a good talker—that is, the man of wit and intellect who has a special gift, almost amounting to genius, for conversation. Such a man is, to use Doctor Johnson’s own admirable word, eminently “clubbable.” He does not need to *try* to speak well; good things bubble up as he talks, exactly as fine lines well up unsought in the mind of a poet. He has a wealth of humor, a delicate wit, wide interests, fine tastes, a large vocabulary; in short, he has mastery of the art of conversation.

But such men, unfortunately, are rare. You meet with them still in certain places. Happily this

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style of conversation, good as it is, is not the only type. We cannot all talk brilliantly, and we may not all even wish to do so. The old cultured flavor, the witty allusions, the classical quips, would not mean much now to the ordinary man in the street; but, because he has no use for this kind of talk, there is no reason to condemn him to abstinence from good talk of any kind. We all talk, every day of our lives, just as we all eat; and, just as we endeavor to find dishes that are at once nourishing and attractive, so we should try to find mental food of the same kind. If we are going to exercise our minds and our tongues in talk for a certain proportion of every day, why should we not try to do it, if not brilliantly, at least as well as we can?

It is recorded of Madame de Staël, the great Frenchwoman who was renowned as a conversationalist, that she once remarked seriously to M. Molé: "If it were not for respect to human opinions I would not open my window to see the Bay of Naples for the first time, whilst I would go five hundred leagues to talk with a man of genius whom I had not seen."

Surely it is allowable to say that every man, whatever his rank or position, ought to be able to express himself adequately and exactly. He ought not to confine his vocabulary to the few limited phrases,

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expressions and turns of speech that we now employ; he should see that there is one word, and, generally speaking, only one, that will express exactly what he wishes to say. He should seek for it, find it, and above all, dare to use it; for it often takes courage to employ the right epithet. He should be able to voice ideas, sympathy and opinions freely and easily; he should be able both to interest and to entertain his company.

In what, then, does good conversation really consist, and how are we to achieve it? Conversation is a real art; and every art consists of two parts, the matter and the style—the soul and the body. The first of these is in all fields infinitely the more important, as the spiritual is always more important than the material. In spoken intercourse, the matter will, of course, vary infinitely, according to circumstances. Every group of persons will have a separate subject or subjects for discussion; but no one has a right to join in their talk who cannot bring to it at least certain qualities that will both affect and depend on the *matter* of the conversation.

He must, to begin with, have something definite to say—some real opinion to offer, some genuine contribution to bring to the talk. If he have this ability he will be heard with respect, however ill or awkwardly he may express himself; and if his ideas

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are original or his opinions obviously sincere, he will meet with genuine liking as well as respect. But, if he is to lay claim to be heard on the merits of the matter only of what he has to say, without regard to his manner of saying it, his ideas and thought must have certain qualities; and among the most important of these are the following:

(I) *Sincerity*.—First and foremost, he must honestly mean what he says. He must not give, as his own real opinion, a phrase that merely *sounds* clever, or noble, or high-minded. He must never advance ideas that he has adopted wholesale from someone else, unless he has given them his full consideration and support. Sometimes he may deceive himself, and really think that he means what he says; but very rarely will he deceive his company. As Jane Austen, in one of her flashes of penetration, once said, "Nothing is so disgusting as the unthinking expression of lofty ideas." So aim, first and last and all the time, at saying *only what you really mean*.

(II) *Candor*.—This is an accompanying quality of sincerity, altho it by no means implies the same thing. It may very often happen that you hold genuine and very strong opinions on some question

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that is under discussion; but, because you feel some diffidence in putting forward your voice against the rest of the company, you fall in with them and allow yourself to be forced into insincerity. It is by no means easy to know when you should assert your opinions boldly and when politeness and propriety require you to hold your peace; but it is a safe rule that if the question is really an important one—if it entails vital principles, involving, for instance, the character of a person or a party or a sect or a nation or a principle—you are bound—even at the risk of opprobrium or contempt, to say what you know to be the truth.

On a question of taste, such as the discussion of a work of art, opinions differ as to the line that should be taken by one who disagrees utterly with the general opinion; but here, too, if you are asked straight out what you think, you must state quite simply your true impression. After all, that is what was asked of you! Of course, if it is a question that involves personal issues—if, for example, the artist or his very close friend is present—you are at liberty to “hedge” or avoid the issue as best you may: but, generally speaking, candor is nearly as necessary an adjunct of good conversation as is sincerity.

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(III) *Tact*.—The mention of candor raises at once the equally important question of tact. You will often find that not only questions of taste, but those of religion, politics, ethics, or even personal matters, may raise such hot feelings that you must exercise a good deal of skill to smooth away a difficult situation. This does not mean that you must necessarily sacrifice candor. It merely implies that since, when once passions are aroused, reason goes, you must do what you can, by preserving quiet, rational conversation (whether by explanation, modification, or even a complete change of subject), to avoid the awkward situation. You need not—and must not—sail under false colors; you should not, for instance, permit your companions to believe that you hold opinions that are not really yours; but you should be able to steer skilfully past the difficult place, giving neither offense nor a wrong impression.

And remember this: if it really becomes necessary to the peace and comfort of your company to change the subject completely, you must take great care in the exercise of the maneuver. Few things are so annoying to ordinary people as to have the conversation obviously switched off to other lines. It implies that only one person in the room—the person who has changed the subject—has the sense

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to keep his head and his manners: it implies that he considers the rest hotheaded, uncontrolled: it implies, in short, an offensive idea of superiority. But a little skill in guiding the talk by easy and natural transitions to other less debatable ground is invaluable when discussion is growing hot and tempers are beginning to show signs of wear.

(IV) *Consideration*. — This very important quality might be classed with tact in some respects; but it implies more in one direction and less in another; it is more of the heart and less of the head. True, to be tactful is to be considerate; but true consideration involves more than tact. Taken in its fullest sense, it implies sympathy for others, and imagination in comprehending, not only their circumstances, but also their prejudices and even their failings. Of course there are certain occasions when truth demands that even this great and necessary quality give way to candor; but whenever we can, consistently with our clear duty, spare the feelings of our companions in any discussion, it is obviously our business to do so.

The necessity for consideration often arises when questions of nationality, religion or politics are under discussion; it may well happen that we are able, by sympathetic comprehension of the feelings

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of others—by the use of the faculty of “putting ourselves in our neighbor’s shoes”—to spare other people genuine distress or even real pain. When topics, especially of politics or religion, arise, run over the company rapidly in your mind, and see if any one of them can possibly be annoyed or hurt. This may sound superfluous advice; but it is astonishing to notice how often the most well-meaning people neglect it; and numerous occasions will occur to anyone of imagination—occasions on which you must be on your guard not to wound the susceptibilities of the most sensitive.

(V) *Originality*.—This quality is all too rare in ordinary talk. How often do you not hear the same well-worn opinions expressed in the same threadbare words! Even when the conversation has drifted to subjects that offer scope for novel thought—politics, art, letters, philosophical speculation—how few new ideas are produced! The work of art is good or bad; the idea is mad or sensible; the theory is fantastic or obvious; and that is all that the ordinary man can produce in the way of comment. If he does begin to discuss the question, he generally falls back on quoting his newspaper or some magazine article; very rarely has he honestly thought the thing out himself.

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It is a good rule that if you are going to take part in a conversation you should never, under any circumstances, repeat any idea (to say nothing of words) that has already been put forward. An idea is no more true for being repeated; it merely becomes boring. Let your remarks give a fresh view of the question; let them provide new food for thought and discussion—or let them remain unsaid.

Of course this does not apply to the ordinary banalities with which a conversation generally opens—the trivialities of weather, health, sport, prospects, and so on; but when the talk begins to open out, try to avoid saying exactly the things that are being said in every other part of the room. If the company gets on subjects that allow of original thinking, let what you say have the merit of freshness even if it be a little fantastic.

"I like to hear Mr. So-and-so talk," said a lady once, referring to an author.

"He is *only* talking," replied a friend. "There is nothing practical in what he says; he is so paradoxical."

"Perhaps," answered the lady, "but he says something *new*. *I always have something to think about afterwards.*"

That is ever the case. The man who has something new to say will always be welcomed. He is

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amusing, if he is nothing else; and to be able to entertain is a most valuable gift.

Here we are, then, with a list of five qualities which, at the least, one ought to bring to the matter of one's conversation, to say nothing (as yet) of the manner in which one should say it. Sincerity, Candor, Tact, Consideration, Originality—a formidable list, you may think! Is it so very formidable? Couldn't all of us easily develop some, at least, of these qualities, if we do not already possess them?

Let us take them in order. *Sincerity*—surely any one can be sincere, especially if he practises the habit of being invariably honest with himself. *Candor*—a little harder, perhaps. It calls for courage, and also for modesty, for an aggressive candor is of little value; but if you follow the rule of speaking out your mind bravely on really important subjects, you will not go far wrong. *Tact and Consideration*—these can be achieved by imagination rather than by any other means; to exercise them, you must be able to put yourself in the place, not of one person only, but of *all your company*. You must bring yourself into sympathy with their feelings, their prejudices, their circumstances; and you must believe them to be sensitive even if they

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at talking well should possess and cultivate; and, being matters of form and expression rather than of thought and feeling—of outward rather than of inward significance—they are easier to acquire if you have them not, and to develop if you already have the rudiments. They are, roughly, three:

(I) *Brevity*.—We all have heard the old saying, “Brevity is the soul of wit.” It must be remembered that “wit” in this connection bears the old significance of “intelligence” as well as the more modern one; but in either sense the proverb is equally true. Hardly any remark, however brilliant—any idea, however original—retains its freshness if it is expressed in a devious or rambling fashion. Often the whole significance of a remark depends entirely on pithy utterance.

There is a story that once George Meredith, that prince of epigram, was engaged on a dramatic version of his book, *The Egoist*. He was asked to write in a speech—a scene, if necessary—to explain the feelings of a character whose love is rewarded with only scant recognition. He summed up the situation in these words: “Must I banquet off this wafer?” He reduced the entire expression of passion, emotion and despair to these six words.

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Now, we cannot all make epigrams; it would perhaps become tiresome if we did; but no one need be tedious. There are certain persons in every kind of society whom the rest of the company always shun if possible—the chronic bores. They do not realize it often; but they have made their companions suffer so often that no one will now listen to them, and their remarks, however useful, are lost because they have so frequently wearied their friends. The most brilliant thinker gains more attention, secures better results, if he expresses himself briefly than if he is even a little long-winded. The minds of his hearers apprehend him more readily: they are more attracted; and if his brevity has rendered him a little obscure, no one will mind asking him to expand his remarks; but who can ask a talker to contract them? The man who knows how to make his meaning clear in a few words has an advantage over other speakers which cannot be overemphasized.

(II) *Simplicity*.—We have all met those dreadful persons whose sole aim in conversation seems to be display. No epithet is bad enough for them; for not only are they objectionable in themselves, but they so disgust ordinary people as to keep them from making an attempt to improve their own

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conversation. "Affected," "conceited," "high-brow," are only a few of the adjectives which are quite justly lavished on these persons. Their thoughts, however original, are at once discounted by their hearers, solely on account of the "superior" way in which they have been put forth.

On the other hand, many of us have been fortunate enough to encounter people whose directness and straightforwardness have at once enlisted our favor. We do not mind if their ideas are a little dull, if their opinions are a little stupid; we honor them for their unaffected simplicity of speech. It is a most attractive quality, and is certainly not a hard one to acquire, since it merely consists in avoiding pretense of any kind. But beware of one pitfall, and remember that to be simple is not to be foolish; to lack ostentation is not to be bare; to be direct is not to be rude.

And remember, too, that the whole merit of simplicity lies in the fact that it is *genuine*; for an affectation of it is more offensive than any affectation of intellectuality could be. To be unpretentious in your talk is to add much to its attractiveness.

(III) *Courage*.—At first sight you may well say, "Why, we have discussed this before with regard to the matter of conversation, and called it 'candor.'"

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Quite true: courage in regard to matter is candor, very often; but we are now referring to this quality in regard to style. You can—and should—show courage as much by the manner of your talk as in the thought itself: and by that is meant that you must not be *afraid* to talk well.

You must not fear the dread imputation of being “literary,” if occasion demands care in the choice of expression; you must not feel diffidence in employing the best you can find. To be afraid of being called affected because you pronounce your words correctly and employ good grammatical construction, is to lack courage.

Obviously all these improvements cannot come at once; but they can be made in time; and by anyone who cares, who makes a real endeavor to raise the level of social conversation, they will eventually be achieved almost unconsciously. The man who does his best to make his own talk worth while, both in matter and in style, is doing a very real service to his fellows. It will be due to his effort that the general level of the talk among his friends becomes higher, more thoughtful, more candid, more sincere, more gracious. We who speak English have inherited a priceless jewel; let us see to it that it does not lose its luster.

II

Matter and Manner

II

MATTER AND MANNER

THERE are some things which are better unprepared; there are some occasions on which spontaneity is better than labored and careful rehearsal. For instance, everyone knows that when you write to a close friend, the more freely you express yourself the better. Evidences of carefully thought out phrases and elaborate reasoning would spoil the real charm of the letter. And even more is this the case with conversation; for in this one of the chief attractions is an easy simplicity.

And yet, the most intimate talk must conform to certain principles to be its best self. Any one who can speak at all can talk; a good many people can converse; but very few indeed can converse well. The reason for success or failure is the same as that which governs behavior—it is that conversation, like conduct, depends on certain personal characteristics which seem, unfortunately, to be on the wane to-day.

Good conversation, like good manners, depends

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chiefly on two main factors—good sense and good taste. If we all had a full share of these two qualities, our manners and conversation would be uniformly and universally good. But unfortunately people do not agree on what is good in both sense and taste—especially in taste, which is an expression of personality; and we are all likely to be blind where we ourselves are concerned. Yet there are certain qualities which are essential to both sense and taste; and, when one thinks of it, these are chiefly those of character—such as simplicity, sincerity, consideration for others, tact, patience, good humor, restraint, lack of self-consciousness, modesty, adaptability, unselfishness generally. All these are necessary to good manners and, to a great extent, to good conversation; but this latter needs also an ingredient which is not essential to good manners—it requires information and knowledge—in short, education.

It is in this respect that the difference between real conversation and mere chatter is evident. Uneducated, or semi-educated, persons can be heard talking for hours; it is generally such people who talk most; but this is not conversation. It is often mere monolog; even if more than one person takes part in it, the talk is usually very inferior and often meaningless. On the other hand, to converse well

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you need not be a person of great learning. The important thing is to understand how to use your knowledge, when to draw on it, and when to reserve it. As Cowper said,

“Tho conversation in its better part
May be esteemed a gift, and not an art,
Yet much depends, as in the tiller’s toil,
On culture and the sowing of the soil.”

Culture! That is the necessary thing. To know how to cultivate the soil of the mind, and what to sow in it, is the secret of educated conversation.

There are, of course, plenty of educated people who cannot converse. Take Lord Macaulay. His reading spread to the horizon in every direction. His memory was prodigious. He was perhaps the greatest master of prose that the English language has known. But he talked so much that some one spoke of him as a “gigantic engine of colloquial oppression.” Or take Coleridge. He was a clever and well-read man, a genius in his own line. He used to talk incessantly when in company, dominating the situation literally for hours at a time; and yet, tho his outflow was generally admitted to be interesting, even absorbing, it was not conversation, for that is essentially an *interchange* of ideas, where several or all should have a voice and bear their share. And it resulted in making Coleridge

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a generally unpopular man, since it aroused feelings of jealousy and dislike among his more ambitious acquaintances and completely crushed the modest and unassuming.

Coleridge is an extreme example; there are happily not many moderns who would monopolize the talk for quite so long at a stretch as he was wont to do; and yet he had more excuse than many speech-monopolists of to-day. He was admittedly a man of genius, and also a man of knowledge. Few people living to-day would flatter themselves that they were the equal of Coleridge; but all too many have his habit, tho perhaps not quite as freely exercised, of grabbing the conversation. Coleridge had two claims to be allowed to talk—general knowledge, of which he had a very large fund, and special knowledge, since he was a recognized master of literature and criticism. Both these are very valuable assets, and few aspire to be master in two such fields.

Is it better to be able to join in any conversation, and talk a little about many things, or to be a recognized authority on one special subject or group of subjects?

At first glance, one would say that general knowledge was of greater and more frequent service. The man or woman possessing wide informa-

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tion, who can say something sensible on a variety of topics, is never at a loss, and is also capable of entertaining a wide circle of friends. Such a person is never at a loss for something to say, or forced to keep an uncomfortable silence.

Conversation generally revolves about a good many points rather than a single one or two; it passes from one thing to another; and this variability often forms a test of the knowledge of those who take part in it. A gathering may be speaking, for instance, of the latest feat in aviation; there follows a discussion as to the next transatlantic flight—whether America, Britain or France will take the honors; the subject thus turns to one of these nations in general, then to some topic connected with that nation—prohibition, or trades unions and strikes, the League of Nations, international politics, armaments, the next war; or to the customs or topography of the different countries, local manners, travel, national art and letters, and so on. The man with some knowledge of each of these fields feels at ease, and is capable of adding a sensible or amusing comment as a new topic arises. Obviously such a command of general knowledge is extremely useful. But how is it to be gained?

Reading, of course, is the best source. It is wise

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to keep in touch with the better newspapers and reviews and to take an educated interest in the doings of other lands. But this should be supplementary to the far more important opportunity of acquiring first-hand knowledge—traveling, if this is possible—and doing so with an open mind; and in any case reading—reading the best authors of any land, skimming the cream of the nation's genius and tasting it for yourself. It is of very little use, either to oneself or to one's company, to be able to criticize art, manners, or letters unless one can do so at first hand, and with some knowledge of the principles underlying art. Second-hand opinions, repeated parrot-like, are both cheap and useless.

But the specialist has his advantages too. He is often in demand at social functions, because hostesses think him a useful man to know. He can be relied on to entertain the company either in some particular subject—books, folklore, aviation, architecture, big game hunting, or what not—or else by speaking of some remarkable personal experience, such as a voyage of exploration, a meeting with a famous person, a narrow escape from a catastrophe, an unusual psychic experience. Such a man is deeply interested in some one thing—anything, from bird life to social rescue work, from sculpture to archaeology—and is capable of arousing interest and en-

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thusiasm in others. The hostess knows that "if there should be one of those awful pauses, Mr. So-and-so will be there; he can be trusted to start something new and interesting."

There is, however, a danger in having more than one specialist of the same kind in one gathering; their conversation is likely to degenerate into "shop." Once started on their pet hobbyhorses, each gaining stimulus from the other, away they go full tilt, and nothing short of an explosion can halt them! And their conversation is likely to be over the heads of the rest of the audience; they need not stop to explain a technical term or to give a reference, and the unfortunate audience, finding the talk quite incomprehensible, are simply bored. No, specialists are only good conversationalists in one case—that is, when they care more for their friends than for their specialty. If they do that, they are both valuable and absorbingly interesting talkers.

It looks, then, as if the ideal equipment for a good conversationalist should be a wide general knowledge supplemented if possible by special acquaintance with one or two particular fields. It needs a mind like that of Bishop Wilberforce, who "took an interest in everything. His observation was sleepless, and made him an excellent naturalist. . . .

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Habit had developed the natural faculties of extracting from everyone whom he met whatever special information could be derived from him." Such a mind can be, to some extent, acquired; and it is worth while, for one's own sake alone, to gain it, for it yields a wealth of interests, not merely superficial, but real, living and creative. We have already considered briefly some of the qualities which will help you to turn your mental equipment to useful account in a social gathering. So much depends on the manner in which you express your ideas, that we shall not apologize for giving more extended thought to this aspect of good conversation.

Whatever degree of education you may have had, in whatever circle you move, simplicity of behavior and expression will always be required of you. Many people make the mistake of thinking that they must strive to be clever, to shine in company, to make epigrams and caustic, witty remarks. They are seldom right, and they are always in danger of being very wrong.

To know this it is merely necessary to put yourself in the place of your friends. You would dislike ostentation in others, so you may be sure it will be disliked in you. Enter a conversation simply, with a quiet, friendly greeting, taking the opportunity

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to give some small sign of real friendly interest. Then, when the conversation begins, let what you have to say be said in language as crisp, plain, pleasant and straightforward as you can make it. Don't try to impress people; everyone dislikes vanity more than he admires brilliance, so the more you avoid any sign of conceit the more popular you are likely to be. In talk as in literature, the every-day word is nearly always the best.

Simplicity has marked the character of most great men. Referring to Sir Walter Scott, the keeper of the ruins of Melrose Abbey once said to Washington Irving: "He'll come here sometimes wi' great folks in his company, and the first I'll know of it will be hearing his voice calling out: 'Johnny! Johnny Bower!' and when I go out I'm sure to be greeted wi' a joke or a pleasant word. He'll stand and crack and laugh wi' me just like an auld wife; and to think that o' a man who has such an awful knowledge o' history!"

The people who are "so awfully glad you've come," who "think your garden an absolute dream," and your children "perfect darlings," who "loathe English cookery after French," who "simply adore Monet" and "simply detest jazz bands" are not only extravagantly exaggerating, but are also generally insincere. Even as they say

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the words, you know that they do not care in the least whether you are there or not, and that they have probably forgotten the appearance of your garden and children. They imagine that they are pleasing you, or that their professed craving for French cookery and simulated admiration for "the last thing" in art marks them as people of culture or taste. If you reply, you will probably find that they do not know what Monet has painted and confuse him with Manet, and that they habitually dance to jazz bands!

Tact depends not so much on knowing what to say as on knowing how and when to speak—and above all, when to be silent. A tactful man is a sympathetic man; he almost instinctively gauges the feelings of those he talks with, and is quick to recognize and repress any thought which, if expressed, might cause embarrassment or pain.

A tactful person does not introduce any subject which is over the heads of his friends. He does not contradict when some one else makes an incorrect statement, but gives it the right construction by some more or less tentative remark—"But don't you agree that that is not always so?" or "But opinions differ, don't they, on that point?" He avoids debatable subjects, if he thinks that they will be disagreeable to any one present, or if he believes

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that his company possess little power of logical discussion. He never introduces painful topics, or dwells on the weaknesses or faults of his acquaintances. He never puts "cornering" questions which demand a certain answer—such as "Don't you agree that So-and-so writes pretty poor stuff?" or "I don't mean to join the X— Society; I think it's quite useless, don't you?" You can hardly ever be both sincere and kind in your reply. Dr. Samuel Johnson was always bitter about such questions as, "How do you like my new book?" He objected to being put in a situation where he might have to be either untruthful or rude.

Giving unsolicited advice is another thing that the tactful talker avoids. "Advice that costs nothing is worth what it costs." If people really want your counsel, they will ask for it, and it will then be received gratefully and may do good; if it is given unasked it is generally rejected, however useful it may be.

Among other pitfalls which the tactful man will avoid are these: telling a delicate person he looks ill; asking an obviously maimed man for recollections of the war; addressing an ingenious question to a woman and then making a silent calculation as to her age; referring to a function or entertainment to which your friend might have been, but was not,

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invited; taking for granted that your acquaintances are familiar with some book or work of art, and showing surprize if they display ignorance of it.

Then there are qualities which should be displayed when one is forced to converse with those who lack consideration and tact. Of these the two greatest are undoubtedly good humor and patience—both of which come naturally to some fortunate souls, while to those of a warm, quick, impatient temperament they seem very difficult to acquire. Here, perhaps more than anywhere, the great virtue of unselfishness shows its presence. The man who can “suffer fools gladly,” who can listen patiently and kindly to a bore, who can take tactless and inconsiderate remarks with good nature, making allowances for the impertinent or selfish speaker, is a good conversationalist even tho he never gets the chance to utter a word. He is, by his patience and amiability, helping some one else to enjoy the hour at his expense.

It has been said that “Honor is seldom given to the silent martyr,” and perhaps self-effacing generosity may not be invariably recognized as a contribution to conversation; but the man who knows how to listen kindly to fools and bores is always a welcome member of any gathering; he is a general favorite, his society is sought, and he has at least

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the satisfaction of knowing that his advent is always hailed with delight. "Oh, good!" thinks the worried entertainer; "there's So-and-so! He'll help me with X"—(the known bore, the dissatisfied, selfish talker). And X, having unloaded all his opinions, his woes, his acrid comments, will leave the gathering under the impression that he has enjoyed "a most interesting conversation. Really, that was a very well-informed man I met at the Blanks'. I quite enjoyed talking with him."

A painfully common fault is the introduction of unnecessary detail. Many amusing or interesting anecdotes are quite spoilt by this habit. If you ask, "How did you enjoy the play last night?" how annoying it is to have such an answer as—"Do you mean *Much Ado about Nothing*? Well, I thought—oh, first I must tell you what a bother we had getting our tickets. . . ." Then follows a rambling account of various bits of ill luck, of missed trains, hurried meals, and so on; then the fact that the theater-goer met "Mrs. Blank—you know, the wife of Blank the manager," and what she said to him and he to her, what she wore, her whole history; and so the flood rolls on, until in the end the polite inquiry is never answered at all.

The man who wants to be popular should "edit" his talk. He should cross out all superfluities, un-

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necessary explanations, digressions, leaving only the essential. As de Quincey said, "It should be an express office of education to form a particular style, cleansed from verbiage, from elaborate parenthesis and from circumlocution, as the only style fitted for a purpose which is one of pure enjoyment, and where every moment used by the speaker is deducted from a public stock." That is the real point—the time given to conversation is a "public stock," and no one has a right to take more than his share.

Besides, in conversation as in other things, empty vessels make the most sound; no one much trusts the opinions, or even the accuracy, of the very talkative man. And he exhausts not only himself but his company; for the definition of realism is also true of conversation—the best is done by selection. Of course, not every topic can be dismissed in a few words; but if there is a lot to say, that is all the more reason for saying it economically. As Voltaire remarked, "The secret of being tiresome is to tell everything."

It is sometimes necessary not only to know how to cut down to the minimum what one has to say, but also to be able to say nothing. Silence can, of course, be rude and boorish; but it can also be the highest form of politeness. Silence is by no means

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even a negative virtue in conversation; it can imply not so much that there is nothing to say as that there is no need to say it. There is definite quality in silence, and to know how to listen, to understand when to refrain from speech, is quite as important as to speak well. "The wise man loveth Silence," said Thomas à Kempis; "Silence is golden," wrote the sage of old. And silence may be a surer sign of wisdom than any speech.

Silence is not only of advantage to one's company; it is of very great value to oneself. The man who knows when to keep silence never betrays his ignorance. He can assimilate the opinions and hear the experience of others, for it is by listening rather than by speaking that one learns most. Of course, one should avoid that "superior" silence which seems to imply that the conversation is not worth joining in; nor should one allow awkward pauses to drag on, nor leave it entirely to one or two people to do all the work of keeping the conversation alive.

To remain silent when one is hearing of a terrible experience or a piece of bad news is a surer sign of true feeling than facile exclamations of pity or distress. And there are always occasions when it is clearly one's place to say nothing—for instance, when an authority on a subject is speaking;

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when any one is making a personal explanation, say of a line of conduct; when some one else obviously wishes to make a remark; when the general talk is becoming noisy; when some one makes an indiscreet or objectionable statement of which you do not approve but against which you cannot, for some good reason, protest; in short, whenever you feel that you cannot contribute profitably to the conversation. Silence in these cases is of real benefit; and it generally carries with it a sense of dignity and modesty.

It is a significant and impressive fact that silence has been chosen by whole nations as the medium of expression of their deepest thoughts and profoundest emotions—those which arise each year on Armistice Day, when the Two Minutes' Silence is observed. In the British Isles, for instance, not a word is spoken throughout the whole length and breadth of the land for those hundred and twenty seconds; yet this is the most memorable and eloquent interval of time in the whole year. Conversationalists might well take a lesson from it.

While we should all try to play our full part in conversation, both in speech and in silence, we must not lose sight of those two inestimable qualities, modesty and restraint. The facile, glib, self-important, conceited speaker never carries as much

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weight as the man who puts forward his views in a gentle, reserved, even tentative manner. One feels that he knows and could say more than he does; with the former one feels that he is covering his ignorance with a camouflage of talk. There is no need to allow modesty to sink into bashfulness; it is even worse to feign reserve with the idea of suggesting a profundity which is not there, or a superiority to the rest of the company.

Still, true modesty never gives these impressions. A modest speaker never shows himself over-eager to recount his experiences, or to cap those of another speaker; he implies, by his speech and manner, when he is conversing with some one of superior intellectual capacity or authority, that he recognizes this and defers to it. Similarly, if he is himself appealed to as an authority, he does not allow himself to seem arrogant and didactic. He introduces his opinion with a few modest words, such as "Well, I believe that . . ." or "I may be mistaken, but I think . . ." or "Most people, I believe, agree that . . ."

Benjamin Franklin in his autobiography tells how he benefited by humility in speech. He writes:

"I made it a rule to forbear all direct contradiction to the sentiments of others, and all positive assertions of my own. I even forbid myself the use

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of every word or expression in the language that imported a fixed opinion, such as *certainly*, *undoubtedly*, etc., and I adopted instead of them, *I conceive*, *I apprehend*, or *I imagine a thing to be so and so*; or *it appears to me at present*. When another asserted something that I thought an error, I denied myself the pleasure of contradicting him abruptly, and of showing immediately some absurdity in his proposition; and in answering I began by observing that in certain cases or circumstances his opinion would be right, but in the present case there *appeared* or *seemed* to be some difference, etc. I soon found the advantage of this change in my manner; the conversations I engaged in went on more pleasantly. The modest way in which I proposed my opinions procured them a readier reception and less contradiction."

It is well to remember that, whatever your knowledge and experience, there are always "two sides to every coin," and to ignore this in conversation is to appear narrow-minded and intolerant. One's friends and acquaintances judge one very largely by one's talk, and if you appear arrogant in conversation you are likely to be thought conceited in general. Some one has well said that the use of words is like an inflated currency—the larger the issue, the smaller the value.

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It is a common fallacy nowadays that the modest person is neglected and ignored. It is not really the case. The quiet, unassuming person (who is not to be confused with the moody, introspective man) usually succeeds, quite unintentionally, in securing attention by the very qualities which are supposed to relegate him to obscurity. In this jaded age, change is the one desirable thing; and modesty is often a real novelty—and a pleasing one.

Silence alone, when another is speaking, does not always signify politeness; one's thoughts may be far away from the speaker, and when this is so, the silence is "dead" and betrays the lack of attention, arousing resentment when it is detected—as it generally is. To be attentive—which ordinary courtesy demands—you must show, by a straight, intelligent look and an occasional small gesture of assent or interest, that you are following what is said. Your very attitude will assure the speaker that you are absorbing his remarks—if you really are! If you are not, you will soon unconsciously betray yourself, and will give offense.

To appear interested in what is said, one must try to *be* interested. Sympathetic imagination will often help you to take a real concern in what your companion is saying, because it will be a revelation of a personality. It will also teach you something,

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even if it is "what not to do." "Attention to the speech of our friends," says Dr. Robert Scarroll in his *Mastery of Nervousness*, "not with criticism, but with the sole object of suggestive comparison, will disclose constant opportunities for acquiring accuracy and selective nicety."

Close attention, however, admits of one pitfall—that of interruption. The courteous conversationalist rarely commits this fault; if he does so inadvertently, he apologizes instantly and continues to listen, reserving his comments till the speaker has finished. Similarly, if one is oneself interrupted, one should not try to continue one's remarks, but should cease speaking at once, as a silent reproach. To raise your voice and continue what you were saying, is undignified and noisy. And this is true of the most intimate talk. Courtesy and restraint are as necessary in the home circle and among close friends as in public; and it is well to remember this, and to practise these virtues always, in every company.

Apart from the actual give-and-take of conversation, there is the matter of "atmosphere" or "tone." Everyone should try to be cheerful and pleasant. These golden attributes come higher in the scale even than knowledge. After all, conversation is a form of entertainment—"perhaps the

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highest pleasure life affords us," as one writer puts it. A cheerful ring should echo through all friendly talk; it should be maintained on a happy plane, and create a warm and pleasant atmosphere. This does not mean that one should be constantly forcing a smile, laughing or uttering witticisms; it simply means that we should try to make talking a pleasure for everyone concerned. Most topics, even the most serious, can be approached pleasantly, without undue solemnity and gloom. When that very human genius Robert Louis Stevenson enjoined a parting friend to "fill your life with laughter and sunlight," he must surely have had in mind that sunlight and happiness which come from good talk, in which he himself shone so brilliantly.

Cheerfulness is partly a question of manner—an open countenance, a buoyant air, a kindly smile and friendly attitude. It is also a matter of principle; and here again unselfishness lies at the root of success. A really pleasant person tries to draw out other people. When the shy and diffident find that some one really wants to hear what they have to say, and pays courteous attention to them, they immediately brighten up, "come to life," and begin to make their contribution to the general talk. It is quite easy to draw every one in, and it is the mark of a good host to do so.

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“What do you think?”—“What is your opinion?”—“You have traveled in that part of the world, haven’t you? How did it impress you?”—“You know more about this than most of us; do tell us what you think?” All these are ways of drawing in the shy outsider.

This quality is absolutely necessary to a good host; but it is valuable to any conversationalist. Ability and knowledge may attract attention; kindness and cheerfulness gain liking. Good humor and courtesy create a warm and genial feeling without which good conversation between all members of a gathering cannot exist.

Even in contentious matters, amiability and friendliness must not dry up. Argument of the best sort is always conducted in a conciliatory spirit. Discussion does not necessarily mean personal antagonism; if it does, it should be dropped. You can dissent from another person politely yet still effectively; direct contradiction is, of course, very offensive, and therefore rarely does any good. Frequently the best topics of conversation are contentious; it has even been said that only three subjects are worth discussing—politics, religion, and love! Without going as far as that, it is still true that these can be made of absorbing interest, for they are generally the fields in which people have

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spent most serious thought and developed most decided opinions.

It is a great mistake to think that one should never venture to disagree with a speaker. Those people who always chant, "Oh, yes," "Certainly," "I quite agree" to whatever is said, are far more irritating than those who openly differ, and can adduce some reason for doing so. Facile assent to any and every opinion shows either a lack of intelligence or a timid terror of arousing ill-feeling, an amiability more stupid than sincere.

One can be perfectly polite in disagreement. "I think I must differ from you there." "My impression was quite the reverse." "Surely you are mistaken?" "Pardon me—how did you arrive at that conclusion?" "I'm afraid I can't quite agree." No one could take offense at such courteous, and yet firm, expressions of dissent.

One way of insuring cheerful talk is to select pleasant subjects—not necessarily non-debatable topics, but agreeable ones. If another person introduces an unpleasant theme, one can tactfully turn the talk to something arising out of it which is yet interesting and helpful. This takes tact and a quick wit, but it can generally be done. If, for instance, some one is dwelling on the symptoms of a disease, you can introduce an *apropos* anecdote

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of some medical man or treatment, or some Old World cure, or curious charm; an account of the gloomy horrors of prison life can be made to lead up to some general topic, such as the after-care of prisoners, the social aims of justice, the vagaries of the law, famous trials, and so on.

There are so many forms which conversation may take, according to the place, time, circumstances, and company, that the successful talker must be possessed of adaptability. No one style is suitable for all occasions, any more than is one style of dress. Like Herrick's Julia, selection is necessary:

"My love in her attire doth show her wit
So well it doth become her;
For each occasion she hath dresses fit."

And the modern shows his "wit" in his choice of topics of conversation, in his way of dealing with them, in the very words he employs and in his general tone and manner. The nature of one's company largely determines one's choice in all these, tho there is one quality which must be used in any company, whether, like the poet you address

"Parson, publican or peer—
Princess, ploughman, profiteer"

—and that is naturalness and ease.

And there we are, back at our starting point:

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the qualities of the good conversationalist are the qualities of the "good sort." At the foundation lies the habit of putting others first. Think first of your company and how best to please them—whether by silence or by speech; and if by speech, think how best to entertain and interest them by that speech. The whole secret of success lies here: You can't go far wrong if you put your friends first and use yourself only as a means of giving them pleasure.

III

What to Talk About

III

WHAT TO TALK ABOUT

VIRTUE consists in doing certain things and leaving certain other things undone. So it is with successful conversation. Definite qualities of heart and mind must be acquired; definite training of thought and voice must be undergone; and, equally important, certain definite faults must be recognized and avoided.

Something has already been said of the defects of actual speech which must be shunned by the man who wishes to converse well. We have seen how he can overcome such failings, and how he can practise the use of the right word until he instinctively rejects the wrong one. But there are other blemishes, quite as common, which lie deeper than expression. There are defects in thought, in choice of subject, in selection of words; and there are defects in the very character. These, however much we may deceive ourselves, are apparent in our conversation as much as they are mirrored in our faces and echoed in the tones of our voice; and especially

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are they clear in the subjects we select to talk about and in the way we deal with topics chosen by others.

We have already said something of the mistakes that can be made in selecting a topic. This will, naturally, vary with one's company and the occasion generally. If one is with intimate friends, with whose views one is familiar, more latitude can be allowed than is the case in a mixed company. You may quite freely discuss religion, politics, art, and other debatable subjects with close friends, even if you do not see eye to eye with them. Such an interchange of ideas and theories is stimulating and educative in the highest degree, because both parties are willing to thrash the matter out; but in a gathering where you do not know the view of even one member, it is unwise and often even definitely rude to bring up burning questions of this kind.

Some one may be present who disagrees utterly with the views offered, but who is naturally shy, or a stranger to the company. He is then in the awkward position of either challenging the whole assemblage by voicing his opposition, or keeping a silence which his conscience may tell him is cowardly. It is a good rule to speak of politics or religion only in the broadest way among a mixed gathering; and it is a sign of a very narrow mind to

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take it for granted that every one present will necessarily share your views.

An example of this occurred a few years ago. A lady of culture and education, who takes a great interest in political and social questions of the day, was made very uncomfortable in the drawing-room of a friend because every one spoke with great fervor on one side of a subject which was then before the public. After some hesitation—for she is of a retiring and even diffident disposition—she put forward her view. It apparently came as a shock to her company that any one *could* take a line different from theirs! They showed, by their manner as well as by their words, that she had, as far as they were concerned, put herself outside the pale. Yet what could she have done, feeling, as she did, very strongly on the subject, and hearing injustices recklessly uttered and believed?

Afterwards her host apologized. "I would never have brought the subject up," he said, "*if I had thought it possible that you would not agree with the rest of us.*" There lies the whole point. If any question does, normally, arouse debate one should not assume that all the company naturally take the same view.

It is more common to do this than one would expect. Often a half sneering allusion or even a

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definitely derogatory criticism is heard which may give great pain to some one present. People are very rash, for instance, in speaking of Jews, "niggers," "Reds," "highbrows," "foreigners," and other such clearly defined groups as if they were obviously wrong or absurd or contemptible. Yet they know that these bodies are very large, and may well embrace some one who is present; and even if this is not so, a moment's thought would tell them that there is no reason, apart from prejudice, why these classes should arouse contempt or hatred, and that they do in fact include persons of very high intellectual or moral power. To "damn them impartially" is to label oneself as narrow-minded to the last degree.

It is equally dangerous to discuss absent people in an acrimonious or contemptuous manner. This, again, has its two pitfalls—it betrays a spiteful, uncharitable nature, which delights in exposing faults or weaknesses; and it also reveals the stupid, unimaginative mind, for to do this is to take it for granted that every one present agrees with you. It is quite possible that the absent person who has just undergone your verbal chastisement is a friend, or even a relative, of some one who is listening to your denunciation.

How embarrassed one would feel if, after a scath-

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ing comment, a covert sneer, or a spiteful anecdote at the expense of some person not present, a member of one's company should say, "Oh, excuse me, but I know that is not the case. So-and-so is a very dear friend of mine, and I am certain that you are mistaken." Whether you are mistaken or not, you are in a very uncomfortable position. And it happens more often than one would imagine that, days after such a conversational lapse has been made, the rash speaker discovers that he has mortally wounded the feelings of some one present who was too shy, too much of a stranger, to speak out at once and put an end to the uncharitable talk.

Gossip of any kind shows the small, spiteful nature. Even when one knows one's company intimately, and is certain that no personal feelings can be hurt by retailing mild scandal, it shows a petty, mean nature to take pleasure in recounting the faults and follies of other people. It is the old story of the beam and the mote—those who are so anxious to find faults in their neighbors are generally too blind to discover their own!

This kind of ill-natured tattle is, of course, definitely wrong; and it is also very stupid. The man (or woman, for the fault is perhaps chiefly a feminine one) who takes delight in exposing his or her friends to ridicule, in revealing small misdeeds, in

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dwelling on social blunders, in raking up old errors, betrays far more his or her own weak and ugly nature than that of the person discussed. Bunyan's Man with the Muck Rake, who was so occupied with his filthy toil that he could not lift his eyes to see a celestial crown held above him, is an exact prototype of these gossiping scandal-mongers. People who are absorbed in dwelling on ugly stories and the disagreeable qualities of their fellow men cannot be interested in the larger and more beautiful aspects of life and thought.

Fortunately, this particular form of bad manners seems to be on the wane. People are becoming better educated; they find wider interests and take more pleasure in beauty than in petty meannesses. They recognize that it is the mark of a narrow mind to be excessively occupied with the affairs of one's neighbors.

One other mistake in the choice of topic is that of too frequent change. There are certain people who seem constitutionally unable to think, or speak, consecutively along one line. They dart from one subject to another with no apparent relevance. If a conversation has turned, say, to the possibilities of broadcasting, they will suddenly begin speaking of something as widely different as Alpine scenery; before that has well started, they

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will ask a question on Einstein's theory of relativity; scarcely is that answered before they have flitted off to the Beethoven centenary, or to some new health cure, or to the production of a Shaw play; soon they are discussing Italian cookery, or the pre-Raphaelite movement, or post-impressionist art—anything and everything, a pot-pourri of half-formed ideas, parrot-cries, baseless opinions and unreasoned criticisms.

These people no doubt imagine that their wide range of topics is an indication of a broad mind and catholicity of interests; and so it might be, if these various themes were discussed at all adequately; but this constant, unbalanced habit of darting from one subject to another without any connecting link really puts a very different label on them. It proves them to be shallow, frivolous, incapable of real thought or wise judgment; and incidentally it makes them extremely fatiguing to their friends.

Besides these faults in selection of topic, there are several other pitfalls which may trap the speaker and make him betray his own blemishes of character. Of these perhaps the worst is due to self-absorption and self-assertiveness. There are a number of people who indulge in what is colloquially, and very expressively, known as "hogging" the conversation. They are so wrapped up in them-

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selves and their own importance that they must keep the talk entirely to themselves. They cannot bear to halt lest some one else should begin to speak. It seems as if their own voices had an irresistible charm for them; they cannot endure a pause in the pleasant sound!

Oddly enough, this fault is not entirely confined to the illiterate. There is a man, a well-known university professor, who has earned for himself an opprobrious nickname by his habit of talking incessantly when in company; and, when his stream of words momentarily gives out, he even, incredible as it may seem, maintains a series of unintelligible sounds so that no one else may take his place! But the "conversation hog" is not normally an educated person; and when you find men or women who always have a flow of voluble chatter on any and every subject, you are pretty safe in writing them down as vulgar, selfish, and uneducated.

There is another form of this fault—a rather more subtle, but no less objectionable, one—which, like the first, is due to self-absorption. It is that of keeping the conversation strictly on one's own special interests—one's family, work, house, possessions, adventures, travels. There are people—all too many!—who seem unable to discuss intelligently any topic with which they are not directly

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concerned. If the talk is directed to art, they speak at once of "my pictures," "my visit to the So-and-so exhibition." If it turns to the countryside, "my garden," "my little place at X," is immediately described, fully and with inordinate gusto. If politics is brought up, "my nephew at the Department of State" is brought in, to the extinction of wider interests.

It is people like this who justify the caustic observation that "It is too patent where our interests lie; the only pronoun written large is—'I'." Certainly "I" is, to such persons, by far the most important pronoun, and person, in their acquaintance. "I," "me," "my" are the words they most frequently utter. They display an almost uncanny ingenuity in giving to every topic some purely personal application, in wresting every subject round to an experience or interest of their own. Such people label themselves with the epithets of "self-centered" and "unintelligent"; for the person who cannot see beyond himself sees a very short way indeed! And, as time goes on and their self-absorption looms larger and larger, until it practically becomes egomania, they add to these labels that one most dreaded of all good conversationalists—the label "Bore."

Another very common fault is that of interrupt-

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ing another person's remarks. This arises from many causes, of which perhaps the most usual is an unchecked impulsiveness. An emotional, quick nature will often commit the social fault of "cutting in" on an unfinished speech because he disagrees with, or thinks that he will disagree with, what the speaker has to say. This is very annoying to the man who has the floor; often he becomes silent, and a valuable contribution to the conversation may thus be lost.

But this, tho an ill-mannered form of interruption, is often forgiven in a person of a very ardent, generous nature. What is far harder to condone is that breaking in upon the talk which comes from lack of attention. It is, of course, a point of good manners to listen to what is being said to one, however dull or tiresome it may be; but how often one hears a careless, ill-bred person "cut in" to what is being said to him, with some quite irrelevant remark!

This should never, under any circumstances, be permitted. It is noticeable that when the great woman novelist Jane Austen wished to show, in the character of Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, a vulgar, ill-mannered, impertinent nature, she gave as an example of such qualities Lydia's habit of "frequently interrupting, with a frivolous or im-

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pertinent observation, the conversation that was going forward.”

If, as sometimes happens, the words of a speaker suddenly recall an amusing anecdote, or suggest an interesting idea to a listener, this should be saved up until he has ended his remarks. Not only good manners, but even prudence, requires this; for an interjection rarely gains its full meed of attention, whereas an observation that is clearly a sensible and interesting one, arising out of what has just been said, and following it, will excite notice and make the impression it deserves.

Even when one wishes to oppose some wrong statement, it is a mistake to interrupt. This causes annoyance and arouses antagonism, whereas by waiting quietly until the speaker has finished one might discover that his remarks had been incorrectly anticipated; and, even if this were not the case, and he was really at fault in what he said, he would listen more attentively to your rejoinder if he were himself allowed to complete his own statement.

Vexation is often caused, again, by the interruption of an anecdote. If a member of the company is telling a story, he finds it most annoying to be checked in order that he should be corrected in some unimportant detail. “Oh, excuse me, you are mis-

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taken; that happened on Wednesday, not on Thursday." "No, that exhibition was at the X. Gallery, not the Y." As if it mattered, for the point of the story, on what exact day of the week or at what precise place the incident occurred! This fault, observation tells us, is most common between members of a family; perhaps it accounts for the undoubted fact that so many good story tellers "dry up" if their relatives are by!

Other people will interrupt a narrative in a yet more irritating way—namely, by anticipating what the speaker is going to say. The whole point of a good story is sometimes spoilt by the person who, presumably with the idea of displaying the brightness of his intelligence, will cut in before an anecdote is finished to guess its climax. Whether he is right in his conjecture or not, the story is ruined.

There is one, and only one, possible occasion in which interruption is permissible; and that is when one realizes that the story, or the remark, is sure to give offense or pain to some one present. Even then, one must first be certain of what is coming; and one must manage the maneuver with tact, so that it is not a rude cutting-off of the talk, but rather a diversion of it into a fresh channel. If one is forced to do this, one can always draw the interrupted speaker aside afterwards and explain the

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reason for this action. And similarly if one has been betrayed by a quick temper or hasty impulse into breaking in upon another person's discourse, one can apologize and try, by tact and humility, to persuade him to continue.

We may sometimes be forced to help out another speaker. If, after long hesitation, your friend is obviously "stuck" for the right term to express his meaning, and you think that you know what word he wants and can supply it, you are perfectly justified in making a tentative suggestion. This is not really interruption, since you do not break into the speaker's talk, but merely supply him with the means of continuing it himself.

Apropos of anecdotes, perhaps it is well to utter a word of warning against the fault, again frequently found in hasty, as well as in conceited, persons, of "capping" other people's stories too often. If, for instance, a person in speaking of a Swiss holiday mentions with some apparent pride that he has climbed a mountain of nine thousand feet, it is not well-mannered to retort immediately that you have done an ascent of twelve thousand. It may give pleasure to yourself to do so; but in the first speaker it can only give rise to mortification and envy.

That is true of all personal narratives and exploits. You must be more interested in your

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friend's account of what he has done than in your own version of what you have done. Of course, if, from his remark, the conversation turns on climbing in a general way, you are at perfect liberty to speak of your own experiences in order to compare notes on various ways of making an ascent, on the advantages and disadvantages of different centers, and so on; or if you find that the company is genuinely anxious to hear of your adventures, you should, of course, gratify them; but these continuations of the topic are permissible only if they are sure to add to the general interest of the conversation—they should never be made for the purpose of self-glorification.

It is well to bear in mind that what may appear amusing or thrilling to yourself may not seem so to your friends. It is therefore, in general, wise to be chary of anecdotes, whether grave or gay, especially when there are already plenty of people only too ready to supply them; and it is always a good rule to limit oneself to two or three stories. It is rather unpleasant to see, as one often does, a man or woman visibly "straining at the leash" till one speaker shall have finished, in order to snatch the next pause for his or her own contribution. Such a person barely allows the last words to be heard—

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certainly does not give an instant for appreciative comments or questions—before launching out.

And how often it happens that such a person has, after all, nothing of exceptional interest to tell! He is obviously one of the egotists already mentioned; his very eagerness to be heard proves that; how likely it is, then, that the sense of proportion will be warped, and that the story he burns to tell will be one of personal rather than of general interest—a story to show to advantage his own wit, resource, courage, kindliness, or whatever it may be, rather than to arouse general interest in a wide and impersonal fashion!

A few other common faults there are, which all show lack of mental or moral training. One of them is that kind of conceit which cannot bear to admit that the speaker lacks knowledge on any subject that may come up. He dreads having to confess that he is ignorant, and therefore he adds to his ignorance the far worse fault of insincerity. He pretends that he has seen the play, or read the book, or visited the place, under discussion. And yet he defeats his own ends; for while no one but a very superficial person would look down on a man for mere ignorance of one special topic, everyone will have nothing but contempt for one who is a hypocrite.

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For it is almost impossible to carry off successfully an imposition of this kind. Anyone who has first-hand knowledge of the play, the book, or the place, or whatever it may be, will see at once that the speaker is a hollow sham; and whereas the person who introduced the subject would, if he saw that his allusions were not taken up, change the topic to one of more general interest, he will often continue to speak of it if any of his company appears to be conversant with it. So the pretender prepares the way for his own unmasking. This absurd kind of vanity has been the butt of novelists for centuries; and yet many of us continue to display it, and to lay ourselves open to amused contempt by our own folly in not daring to say outright, "I have no knowledge of the subject."

Another form of vanity is the trick of hypercriticism. The person who carps priggishly over every sentence, who demands chapter and verse for every reference, who insists on verifying every allusion, who winces obviously when any member of his company makes a slip in grammar or mispronounces a word, is nothing more nor less than a very ill-mannered snob. He is dreaded and shunned, especially by the truly sensitive, shy person. "Oh, I can't talk to So-and-so!" you will hear nervous people say. "He terrifies me. He seems as

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if he were always waiting to pounce on me for mistakes, and so of course I can't help making them whenever I talk to him."

How could a person who aroused such feelings ever hope to be considered a pleasing companion? Conversation is relaxation; it should be a pleasure to all who join in it; how can this freedom and enjoyment exist in the presence of a person who is always on the lookout for faults in the speech or statements of his friends?

Another absurd, tho trivial, mistake which some people—notably women, but also some clerics, teachers, and literary or artistic people—make is that of displaying a quite undue amount of intensity over trifles. There are people of this type who, instead of a normal, friendly greeting to an acquaintance, will hail you as if you were a long-lost brother. They hold your hand for minutes while they gaze earnestly into your eyes. Instead of a simple, pleasant inquiry after your health, they utter, in tones of the deepest, most mournful solicitude, some phrases like these: "And are you *really* feeling *perfectly* well? I heard that you had such a *dreadful* cold. I know how *terribly* ill one can feel with a really *bad* cold. I *do* hope you are really *quite* well again?" Or, on hearing that one has dismissed a maid, "Is it *really* true that you are

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losing your maid? Oh, I am so grieved for you. It will be so difficult to replace her. It is such a *dreadful* loss for you." These good people could hardly express more emotion if they were lamenting over one's last illness, or the death of a dear friend. It is often difficult to repress a smile as one replies civilly to their ridiculous intensity.

And just one more error is fairly common, tho never found among well-bred people—that is, the habit which is sometimes indulged in among the would-be clever of referring to private jokes or to some unexplained experience which only one or two of the company can share. The rest of the gathering naturally feel awkward and embarrassed as these veiled allusions pass, as some apparently meaningless remark calls up a significant smile, as one person greets another by some absurd pet name which indicates an incident of which only the two know. This sham privacy is a clear sign of vulgarity. If you find that by chance you have unwittingly made such a covert reference, you should either briefly explain it, or, if (as may well happen) its explanation would not be of general interest, pass it over lightly with some such words as "That's just a trifle that happened to us both," or "That's a name we use sometimes in fun."

There are, of course, many other things to avoid.

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They depend on the occasion, the company, on a variety of different circumstances. Conversation can be made not only interesting and entertaining but also perfectly safe if one bears in mind the broad rule that it is the duty of every member of a social gathering to give pleasure rather than to receive it.

IV

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IV

THE PERSONAL ELEMENT

ALL conversation is by no means of the same type. Generally speaking, it falls into three main categories: social, personal and intimate, and business. Of these, the first is that which is most generally recognized as conversation, and when we hear the word it is commonly of this sense that we immediately think. It was social intercourse of this kind that was invariably meant by the term in the eighteenth century—that palmy time of this art in England; and it was of intercourse of this kind that Jane Austen’s character was speaking when he condemned the new arrival in the neighborhood by saying, “I believe he is a very good sort of man; but he has no conversation.” In that day and that society to “have no conversation” was, *ipso facto*, to have neither breeding nor education.

We have not, consciously, the same standard now. We do not refuse to associate with those who cannot converse in the truest and best sense of the

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word; yet we do, whether consciously or not, take a very real pleasure in hearing good interchange of talk; and, whether we realize it or not, we are most of us capable of having part in it.

In all three types of conversation—social, private and business—there are certain requirements which we should recognize. Besides these, each has its own special individual qualities to which attention must be given if success is to be achieved. Not many people shine in all three; a good business talker does not necessarily succeed socially; the man who, in the company of one close friend, or in the bosom of his family, is a conversationalist of a brilliant and sympathetic kind, is not necessarily able to sell goods with a persuasive tongue. Some people shine in one type and some in another; a few—too few—succeed with all three.

Like all other arts, conversation is, to a certain extent, a natural gift; it is, however, far more general than the greater arts, and is infinitely more capable of cultivation; that is, it is possible with this as with no other art, for a person with little or no natural aptitude to acquire it by cultivation alone. Perhaps the best conversationalists are born and not made; and yet those races who are naturally great talkers, fond of this mode of self-expression, have not produced more brilliant or more success-

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ful exponents of the art than those which are known for taciturnity. The Latin races generally are noted for brilliant interchange of speech; the average French or Italian peasant can, and often does, really "converse," and the French have perhaps brought the art to a higher standard of perfection, polish and ease, than any other nation.

The Slavonic peoples have their share of natural ability, and can speak with passion and fluency on those topics nearest their hearts; yet tho the Teutonic and Anglo-Saxon nations are, generally speaking, slow, heavy and dull in comparison with their more brilliant neighbors, no nation can show conversation more brilliant, easy, witty and charming than some of the talk of the famous exponents of the art in England of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. That is, tho the art is not perhaps natural to our race, we can master it and bring it to a high state of perfection.

We have said that there are certain main requirements for conversation of whatever type. Of these the first and most important is interest in our fellow men. If we are genuinely concerned in the affairs and personality of those with whom we speak, it follows that we can not only *talk to* them but can also *converse with* them. We recognize that the dullest, most uninspiring of mortals is also

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immortal—that he is human, and more than human; that he has in him something which is alive, ardent and precious; *that no one else in the world is quite like him.* The prosiest old man, the vulgarst shopgirl, the heaviest laborer, has something to tell, something to express; and he who has a real interest in his fellows can not only himself reveal something to these unpromising companions but can even, by sheer force of sympathy and genuine fellow feeling, make them give something in return.

Especially is this true of many primitive folk. Silent as clods in the presence of a stranger—dimly resentful of being mocked, patronized—they will expand like leaves in the genial warmth of real understanding. Question them, talk down to them, and they remain tightly enclosed within the walls of their own impenetrable silence; but let them see that you are of the same human mold as themselves, and they will talk to you freely and wisely of themselves and their kind. Do not we ourselves converse more easily with our equals than with those whom we believe to be greatly our intellectual superiors? What ordinary undergraduate talks readily with his Dean? What schoolgirl with her Principal? What commonplace individual with a brilliant philosopher or statesman?

The second great quality on which not only all

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good conversation but also all happy human relations rest is a virtue—the greatest of all virtues, Charity. Charity in talk consists in more than simply refraining from unkind gossip or biting little sarcasms; it consists also in *thinking* kindly of those of whom and with whom we speak. The thin-skinned, hypersensitive egoist, who is always on the lookout for snubs and perpetually expects to be wounded, will never make a good conversationalist. He (or she, for this kind of supersensibility is commonly a feminine failing) will see a slight or a sarcasm in the lightest, most careless word—more, will take a morbid pleasure in discovering these imaginary wounds. He relapses into a hurt and huffy silence, and no amount of persuasion or pleading can convince him that no insult was dreamed of in the offending remark! He will not believe because he does not wish to believe. He prefers to be hurt rather than think that the speaker had no thought of him in mind, for such is the power of egoism that it enjoys pain rather than insignificance.

To say nothing of its folly and selfishness, this is a very unkind attitude to take. Why should we impute deliberate rudeness to those with whom we speak? If one is to be perpetually on one's guard lest the most trivial word should offend some sus-

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ceptibility which appears to exist merely in order that it shall be offended, where is the possibility of that ease and sincerity which make conversation, in the best sense, possible? No; give and take is as fundamental a part of good conversation as it is of all human relations; if our friends sometimes unwittingly wound us, the probability is that we as often hurt them; the unintended pain must be taken as quietly as an unintended physical pain would be, with a smile of the heart as well as of the lips. And this great virtue of charity will also rule good conversation in that it will forbid all wounding remarks concerning those who are absent as well as those who are present.

The third of the fundamentals of all good conversation is knowledge—knowledge, that is, not of everything—what human creature can boast of that?—but of a few, or even of one, thing of real importance. It may be books, or farming, or music, or the sea, or gardens, or astronomy; social welfare or folk-lore or politics; mechanics or trade or education; a craft or an art—so long as it is big enough and wide enough it will do; for to have genuine knowledge of one big thing is to have a mind that is, to some degree at least, developed; and that means a mind that is receptive. A man or woman who truly *knows* any one big thing will not

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stop there; for real acquaintance with any great subject involves knowledge (or at least curiosity, which is the gateway to knowledge) of allied subjects, and implies moreover the possibility of learning, whether consciously or subconsciously. The student of literature cannot escape interest in the human and the historical, as well as in the technical, side of his study; the farmer who is worth his salt must discover something of biology and chemistry.

Tho knowledge is a necessary base of conversation in its full sense, education, that is, formal education, is not by any means essential at all times. In intimate and personal conversation, an unlettered laborer may shine as a man of culture may not. Yet in the narrower sense of the word conversation—in the eighteenth-century sense, the polished sense—real education is of the greatest importance and value. For social colloquy consists largely in intellectual contacts, in the flint-and-steel give-and-take of mental equals, in readily caught allusions, in references to books or facts, pictures or people, which are not “understood of the people.”

Another requisite is openness—frankness, that is, without garrulity. To chatter unlimitedly of the doings of one's self or one's neighbor, is to kill rather than to encourage the exercise of the art, since it destroys the possibility of that give-and-take which

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is a fundamental of conversation as opposed to talk. To be obviously reticent is, on the other hand, often tantamount to a snub. Sometimes, of course, the words of an impertinent or inquisitive person may require the administration of the silent rebuke of reserve; but to be unnecessarily secretive without cause is in itself a sort of rudeness to which resort should be made only under real provocation. Neither, however, is it wise to be too outspoken either about one's own affairs or those of others unless one is very intimate with the person addressed. Often an impulsive, generous man or woman has courted trouble by speaking too freely to untrustworthy companions; those who are frank and confiding by nature, and speak without due thought, are likely to regret on maturer consideration their want of reserve. Their unguarded opinions and comments are passed on, often a little altered or misconstrued in the passing, and the result has sometimes been disastrous.

The next great requirement of all conversation is a genuine respect for the mental abilities of those with whom we speak. No proper interchange of ideas is possible when one person feels himself to be the mental inferior of the other. In this as in many other human relations, the great virtue of humility is a real necessity if we would establish a sympa-

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thetic contact with others. It need not be forced or affected; no man can truly judge of his own quality of mind, or class another's as below his own, without some degree of real intimacy. The poet Wordsworth himself, speaking of his sailor brother, said, "John is a silent poet; but he is the greatest poet of our time." We cannot tell, without close acquaintance, whether those we meet are not silent poets, or philosophers—or saints. We must therefore assume at least an equality of intellect, and must treat their opinions, tastes, and even prejudices as worthy of respect until further disclosure proves the contrary.

Perhaps nothing is so clear a sign of ill-breeding as the desire (only too common, unfortunately) to "score off" another person and establish a reputation for brilliance at the expense of wounded feelings or mortified pride. It is this failure to respect the mental caliber of an acquaintance that makes the fear and dislike of "clever" persons so general; and it is a blot on our intellectual life that it should be so. Yet, in endeavoring to avoid these errors, we must take care that we never lose spontaneity. A certain unforced, genuine warmth of interest and sympathy must be present in good conversation of whatever kind; for, as A. C. Benson puts it, "The first requisite of talk is that it should be spon-

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taneous and sympathetic." Geniality and freshness must never be overlooked in the acquisition of any other quality whatsoever; for, whatever else be gained, if these be lost, much indeed is lost.

In all colloquial intercourse, too, an added delight is given by that quality which the Greeks called *nous*, and which we rather inadequately translate as "wits." Not "wit"; delightful as that is in its proper sphere and within proper bounds, it is by no means a necessity to conversation of every kind; but intelligence, humor and good sense, such as may be met with in any rank and in any nation. The racy comments of the laborer, the solid good sense of the bourgeois head of the family, the intelligent comprehension of life possessed by so many men and women of every walk, all go to give to conversation both spirit and force. And it is not enough to be able to appreciate these qualities in others; we should try, too, to cultivate them in ourselves and so to possess that kindly outlook on life, that sane optimism and intelligence, that clarity of thought and vision, which go to make up *nous*. Thus we can give as well as receive pleasure.

Finally, there is one quality which we shall always find in good conversation of whatever type—the quality of repose. Hurry, agitation, haste to "get one's oar in," eager interruptions, angry com-

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ments, too hasty snatching at the gist of another's words before they are well out of the mouth, a breathless monolog—all are destructive of what is best in the art under discussion. Ease is necessary; a feeling of composure, relaxation from effort, and that delightful sense of security which comes from the contact of minds and personalities sympathetic and well attuned.

Let us now consider the three main types of conversation separately, and see how each has its own special requirements. Social conversation is that which is most generally meant by the word; that is, conversation on a more or less formal occasion with those to whom we are comparative strangers. Now, to some unfortunates the very thought of having to talk to strangers to keep them amused, entertained, and interested as part of a social duty, is a real nightmare; and their fear is augmented illimitably if they know that this unfamiliar companion will be a person of intellectual distinction. "Oh, I *can't* talk to So-and-so! He's so terribly clever!" the unhappy victim may be heard to wail; and the fear is allowed to prey on the mind until it becomes an obsession and even chat of any kind with this dreaded companion becomes quite impossible. Some shy, nervous persons have even been known to work themselves up into a state of real illness by

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dwelling on the ordeal of being thus thrown with a mental superior! Such an extreme as this is, happily, rare; but the feeling that causes such a collapse is by no means uncommon. How is this to be overcome?

The remedy is obvious. Fear and diffidence can be conquered by acquiring a certain measure of self-confidence. There are many ways of achieving this desirable end, of which the most certain as well as the most valuable is by auto-suggestion. No deep acquaintance with psychology or psycho-analysis is necessary to effect a cure of one's own diffidence by this means. We are timid because we have subconsciously persuaded ourselves that the brilliant So-and-so will be bored by, or contemptuous of, our puny conversational efforts; let the cause of our trouble become its cure by now consciously persuading ourselves that if So-and-so is clever he probably has a kindly tolerance for those who are not, just as the strong man is gentle with the weak; let us tell ourselves that in any case he cannot be accustomed to meet those as brilliant as himself, but is probably quite used to talking with those far less so. And it is indeed the case that the most brilliant of intellectuals are generally not only tolerant of mediocrity in others but actually prefer the repose of a quiet, unpretentious conversa-

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tion with one who, if commonplace, is at least sincere.

Indeed, they may be very glad to be with one who is content to listen, and does not demand to be heard. But even the kindest of intellectual giants are impatient of a surface cleverness which is put on for the occasion and which their own mental superiority enables them to dismiss as false after a few moments of talk. Some take a malicious pleasure in leading the intellectual sham on to commit blunder after blunder as a punishment for his feigning to be what he is not. But no man who is really great in any capacity can have anything but admiration and liking for genuine simplicity. A sound principle is never to try to give a false impression of what we actually are. That is earthly as well as spiritual wisdom; did not even the worldling Polonius know the value of it when he advised his son "To thine own self be true"?

Avoid, too, that terror of being looked at and laughed at which, like all forms of self-consciousness, is in reality not so much a form of exaggerated humility as a form of conceit. Let us take things simply, admitting to ourselves that we are not of sufficient importance to attract ridicule, and telling ourselves that our companions are too kindly and well-bred to mock at us even if we were. In

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short, let us be prepared to think the best of those whom we meet; let us assume that they will be kindly and sympathetic; let us never think of the impression we are making except in so far as to consider whether we are making our companions happy; finally, let us enter into social company determined that we are going to be pleased and interested, and that we, in our turn, will be found to be likable and interesting. This decision will not only dispel the fears which overhang like clouds the thought of the coming conversation, but will, by the force of heterosuggestion, actually create in those with whom we speak some impression of coming pleasure and interest.

After diffidence, another great obstacle to good social conversation is that other form of self-consciousness of which some mention has already been made—the desire to shine. Some people are dazzling by nature; but these are all too rare, and they are soon recognized when they appear like planets in the social heavens! It is the greatest mistake to force epigrams and paradox in order to give an appearance of scintillation or intellectualism to conversation; the sole effect made is one of restless unease, an almost feverish sense of strain; and we generally incur the reputation of conceit and folly rather than one of brilliance by these frantic at-

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tempts to shine in society. Stupidity, even, if accompanied by kindness and simplicity, is infinitely preferable to pretentiousness.

On the other hand, if we happen to be of the number who naturally converse with sparkle and wit, it is a mistake to allow diffidence to quench our natural gift when we are in the company of those whom we know but slightly. There are certain people who, when alone with a few real intimates or in the family circle, will talk with real brilliance and ease, but who, in the presence of comparative strangers, at once withdraw into their shell and appear as commonplace as, or even duller than, their fellows. Now, if they are among their intellectual or educational inferiors, this is a generous as well as a well-bred thing to do. Paradox, epigram, witty quotation or allusion, would merely mystify and embarrass the general company, and would therefore be destructive of general conversation. But if these happy-tongued folk are in the company of their mental equals, it is a mistake to repress natural wit and gaiety which would amuse and enliven those with whom they talk.

Wit, of course, is largely a question of taste. To some, it remains incomprehensible and vaguely offensive; to others any barb, kind or cruel, fair or unjust, is permissible if it is truly bright and clever.

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Some of the most amusing quips of the great eighteenth-century wits can only have been made at the expense of pain and mortification. We read with an appreciative chuckle the biting sarcasms of Dryden or Doctor Johnson, and perhaps a saying that has retained its flavor for nigh on two centuries may be forgiven something of its cruelty; yet it seldom happens to-day that a witticism is made at all comparable in brilliance to those of the great epigrammatists; and it is extremely doubtful whether, in view of the distress and humiliation they so frequently cause, a personal quip, however clever, is permissible.

Of course, this stricture applies only to personal shafts; a man is always at liberty to turn a keen phrase or to coin an epigram on a work of art, a political topic, a book, or anything else not dealing with an individual; and indeed it sometimes happens that a happily-worded gibe may spring out almost without intention.

Here, as in all other matters of human contact, we must try to see with the eyes of others. If it is we who have turned the phrase, we must see if we have caused pain, and if so, must try to make all the amends in our power. If it is some one else who has made the witticism at our expense, we must try

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to see the joke against ourselves and join in the laughter evoked by the happy hit.

In general conversation of any intelligence, certain topics are bound to arise which admit of, and even demand, argument. Now the essence of good disputation is first that it should be logical and well reasoned, second that it should be good-humored. Nothing is more pitiable than the man who cannot bear opposition. He is like the "unsporting" individual who cannot tolerate losing at a game of chance or skill. It may be true that debate, even if on a high plane, usually achieves nothing, and that "a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still"; but quite apart from its success as a means of converting others to a new opinion, argument is in itself of great value in forcing those who engage in it to arrange their ideas logically and to learn to refute objections which they have, perhaps, never really considered.

It is only by intelligent fencing with a skilled opponent that we can realize the exact merits and demerits of our own opinions; and this sword-play is perhaps one of the most stimulating mental exercises possible. It has been said that there are only three topics of conversation really worth while—politics, religion, and love; and, of these three, two, at least, are generally argumentative. Even if we

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deny this assertion (and, indeed, few would support it in its entirety), it is certainly true that these topics, if discussed by those whose minds are on a par, who are good-humored, sincere, and to some extent intimate, produce better controversial conversation than any others. But these conditions must all be kept, or discussion of these topics is worse than useless. It is of less than no value to enter into a heated debate on religion with a bigot, whether orthodox or atheist; it is equally futile to carry on a political disputation with one whom we know to be rabidly of another opinion. We must have some acquaintance with our company before we tread on such ground; then, we may enter into an argument which may be of real value to both sides.

We are thus led up to the general question of topics permissible in social conversation. As has just been seen, it is both good sense and good manners to avoid debatable ground in unfamiliar company. The ice must be broken by turning to such general subjects as may arise—the season, the countryside if we are in rural surroundings, plays or exhibitions if in town, sport, scenery, travel—all may lead to interesting and entertaining talk among those who were recently strangers. Said an eighteenth-century duenna, writing to a young lady

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about to enter into society: "Some Conversation is permitted in going down the Dance; only guarding against any Appearance of Learning or Phantasy. You may speak of such Topicks as may be suppos'd to be of Interest to a Gentleman, viz. of Common Acquaintance, of the Chase, of the Play, and even a little of Politicks, if only you beware (my dear Miss) that he think you not Learn'd, than which nothing is more disgusting to a Gentleman in a Young Lady."

Without being quite as disingenuous as that, it certainly is good advice to try to interest our neighbor in the social game, and to do so by entering at first into light chat on non-controversial topics; then, when more is known of the personality and tastes of our circle, we can go into fields where, tho opinions may differ, discussion will not be acrimonious—questions of art, drama, music, criticism, and so on, leading eventually perhaps to more debatable subjects if the occasion seems fit.

There is a snare even in such conversation as this, however, for the too impulsive nature. The warm, generous disposition is too likely to be carried away, to become excited, impatient, or perhaps to grow so absorbed in the discussion as to forget the rest of the company in conversation with the one. Faults, these, of course; yet forgivable faults; they argue

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sincerity and genuine interest on the part of the speaker, and so are infinitely preferable to stiffness, affectation, bored and insincere acquiescence, even to an air of too great caution and restraint. The happy mean between over-eagerness and self-consciousness, between too great impulsiveness and too great reserve, is, of course, the manner at which all new acquaintances should strive; but better to err on the side of nature than on the other.

Finally, when engaged in argument, avoid the failing, generally more common among women than with men, of agreeing enthusiastically and unthinkingly with the statements of your neighbor. It is a sign of ignorance and servility to do this; and if a subject is brought up with which you are unacquainted or on which you disagree with your neighbor's view, the polite and honest thing to do is to say simply, "I'm afraid I know nothing about it," or "I fear I don't agree."

A certain amount of current news makes a good topic for general social conversation, always granting that this is not allowed to degenerate into mere gossip. There is a certain type of talker who seems to be so intellectually starved that no interest is taken in anything save petty personalities, generally slanderous, about neighbors and friends. "*Have* you heard about Mrs. X?" they will begin,

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with greedily glistening eyes. Nothing is too trivial, too mean, too unkind, even too disgusting, for these modern equivalents of Bunyan's Man with the Muck Rake. And the dreadful thing is that often they can attract attention and encourage competition. After all, to the average man or woman, few things are as interesting as other men and women; that is why novels are read more than any other type of book. Few of us can resist listening to gossip, yet harmless tho it may be at first, it is one of the most dangerous of social evils. "*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*" is an admirable sentiment; but it does not go far enough. "*De hominibus nil nisi bonum*" would be a better motto for the generous and well-bred conversationalist.

This prohibition extends to all really slanderous talk, whether about acquaintances or public characters; but it is not intended to rule out anecdotes which are witty without being abusive. A good story which turns on the personal peculiarities of a prominent man or a character personally unknown to our audience, may be forgiven even if it be a little malicious; and humorous anecdotes that have no ill feeling in them are more desirable. "Good stories are the plums in the pudding of conversation," and a really good story, if unobjectionable, is too big a plum to leave out. But the

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man whose whole conversation consists of anecdotes, or who drags them in, twisting the general trend of the conversation to make an opportunity for relating them, who repeats them often or tells them badly, commonly degenerates into a bore to be dreaded and avoided by his acquaintances. Anecdotes, to be successful, must be apposite to the occasion, must have the air of spontaneity, must be fresh, well told, in good taste. As the pudding is spoilt by too great profusion of plums, so good conversation is marred by too many anecdotes, however witty; as the schoolboy appreciates the plums in his pudding for their very scarcity, so the company enjoys the occasional story which gives point and life to the general flow of conversation.

Just one more warning must be given. Some hosts and hostesses have a way, when introducing new acquaintances, of mentioning at the same time some detail concerning each—profession, attainments, or what not. “This is Professor Blank, the famous philosopher,” or “Miss Dash, whose novel has just come out.” This, tho kindly meant, is generally a mistake, since we should meet our fellows in their capacity as human beings in the first instance; but if it is done we should try not to let our knowledge of the gifts or qualifications

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of our new acquaintances sway the conversation to an exaggerated degree. If we know that a man is a lawyer or a woman is a painter, we need not therefore consider it our duty to talk to them exclusively of crime or art. Often the professional of whatever kind is only too glad to dwell on some topic quite other than that which makes his daily task.

A woman who had taken up district nursing as her life work was once heard to remark with some bitterness, "People always seem to think that because I nurse the poor I am interested in nothing else. They never talk to me of books or music or anything but nursing. They don't realize how badly I want to stop being a nurse sometimes and *be just a woman* for a little." So, unless the professional gives a lead, it is more polite not to speak of it except as it naturally arises in the general course of conversation.

In intimate personal talk, naturally no such hard and fast rules obtain. We know our friends' minds, tastes, susceptibilities; we know (or should know, if we really are friends) how far we can safely go in opposition, criticism or raillery; we know what allusions will be significant and which will fall short of their aim in conveying a meaning more subtle than words. Our language is freer;

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we can permit silences of longer duration than is polite among mere acquaintances, since "among friends, silence is often the best speech." Intimate conversation with a friend of our own mental standing is often the best part of a liberal education. Ideas are generated by contact between two such minds as the spark is generated by the contact of flint and steel; in talk of this kind we clarify our own minds, add to our store of mental conceptions, pursue opinions to their origin; and all the time we may feel that these happy results are mutual, and that both alike benefit by the pleasure of such interchange of thought.

Yet even in intimate conversation there are certain things to be avoided. We must take care not to carry either argument or raillery too far, or we must learn to feel when neither is at the moment desirable; we must guard against discussing our common friends' characters or affairs uncharitably; we must try to have a sympathetic intuition of our companion's mood and correspond to it as far as we are able. We must here, even as in talk with mere acquaintances, limit the thought or talk of self; "I" must be less frequently heard than "you." Yet, while aiming always at genuine sympathy in the best and broadest sense, we must try to retain our own individuality—never to allow ourselves

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to be merged in the personality of a friend by agreeing too eagerly or accepting his opinions without due thought. Neither should sympathy lead us to that false imitation of it which becomes mere sentimentality.

There is one other danger to guard against in friendly conversation. If it should chance that we are more widely read or better educated than our friends, we must be careful not to let them feel this. We should not refer to books, pictures, or anything else to which they have not had access in such way as to give an impression of superiority.

Business conversation is almost an art apart, and hardly comes within the scope of this work. But it is perfectly possible to conduct a business conversation on the general lines of a social one; after all, the principles underlying both are to some extent the same—to give pleasure, to be frank, sympathetic, straightforward, and yet to have something of reserve.

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A MIND that is stored with knowledge gained from teachers, books, travel, observation, reflection, and other sources, has an abundance of material to draw upon in daily speech. Hence the cultivation of the mind is a prerequisite to good conversation.

Our actions, our speech, our gestures, our impulses, are one and all mere reflections of our inmost selves. It is what we *think* that molds our words and deeds, even the simplest and most unconscious. And as it is by those habitual expressions of face, voice and body that we are judged, so it is by the motive power that stimulates them that we must inevitably succeed or fail. The man whose ideas are muddled, whose thought is crude or vague, whose opinions are dull and stereotyped, whose mind is bleak and barren, inevitably—even unconsciously—betrays the fact in his face, his tone, his conversation, his very walk. He cannot conceal what he is. And it is thus that the true

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aristocracy is being formed as, more and more, society comes to discard the mindless and to accept the thoughtful.

Meditation is necessary to any true development of mind; it is the process by which all that we see, hear, read, think, is turned into solid mental food. It is a power which every thinking man should do his best to cultivate. When an idea occurs to him, when a scene or phrase attracts his attention, he should not let it slip off the surface of his mind like the reflection off a highly polished mirror; he should let it sink in, as a stone sinks through the depths of water.

Men and women alike, we have in recent years become too likely to act hurriedly, to speak without reflection, to accept new notions without consideration, to allow our minds to act almost mechanically. In this way we are deliberately allowing the best part of our mental equipment to go to waste. To act and speak without reflection is either to behave, like animals, on impulse, or like machines, by the driving-force of routine.

How is meditation to be developed? How are we, living in an age of hurry and thoughtless acceptance of shibboleths, to acquire the power of deep, steady concentrated thought? At first it is not easy. It is like any other practise that is valu-

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able, a matter of slow growth but of enduring strength. Meditation is a matter of habit. A few minutes' quiet study, every day, on any matter of eternal interest and vitality, should be the first step in its cultivation. These few minutes should then be increased to a quarter of an hour or so, a definite subject being selected for consideration; and, in addition to this, care should be taken never, at any time, to allow oneself to make a hasty, unthinking statement, or pass an unconsidered judgment on any matter whatsoever. By these means the power of meditation will develop and grow apace.

Imagination is the natural partner of meditation. Imagination is the spirit, as meditation is the life, of the mind. Imagination, besides providing us with a great source of inner happiness, adds also to the pleasure of comradeship. It helps us to know our fellow men; without it, indeed, we cannot truly know them. By its aid we learn to appreciate their shortcomings, to take a real part in their lives—in a word, to understand them.

Imagination, like any other great and fine quality, can be encouraged or killed. It is the aim of every far-sighted educationalist to-day to foster its growth, so that our children, at least, may bring something of its joys to their maturity. But some of us, who have been brought up in a narrower

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school of life, may have found that in the process those tender shoots which every child brings into the world as part of its dowry, have been crushed and choked. How can we revive them or implant them afresh? How can we get imagination if we have it not?

The truth is that almost no one is entirely devoid of this faculty; the germ is there, if it is only properly cultivated and cherished. There are three ways of doing this—by contemplation, by study of the world about us, and by cultivating the arts. We should try to see more than the outward appearance of things; we should, like Shakespeare's Jacques, try to see "books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything." And we should aim also at avoiding the type of Peter Bell, of whom it was said,

"A primrose by the river's brim
A yellow primrose was, to him—
And it was nothing more."

In those few lines Wordsworth summed up forever the mental outlook of the dull clod of a man; and, in the development of the poem, he shows the consequence of that sluggishness—the blundering cruelty, the debased outlook, that are cured only through the sudden reawakening of the imagination by the force of terror. We should, then,

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try to see "the soul of things"—to understand, by spiritual vision, what it stands for, what it means.

And the same is true of our relation to other people. The dullest, ugliest, stupidest person is, after all, a Person—an individuality, a soul. What depths of wisdom, courage, patience, humility, may lie under an unpromising exterior, only the sympathetic, imaginative man can learn. Men, as Pope knew, repay study more than any other of the works of the universe; but, like the dumb creation, they are not to be read by the careless passer-by in one hasty glance.

The imagination must be cultivated by feeding it with all that is noble, beautiful and inspiring in the world of art and nature. That innate sense of awe which seizes every human being when he comes face to face with the glories of surroundings—the touch of reverence that the smallest, commonest flower can inspire; the story of the sculptured piles of architecture, the deep solemnity of music, the secrets of painting, the treasures of poetry and drama, the stirring tales of history—all must play their part in helping the growth of this living, lovely plant.

Then, in our resources, comes that more solid element—the development of ideas and reason by means of the logical following of a trend of

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thought. Reading is perhaps the chief basis of material for this—reading coupled with real consideration of the facts or theories that the books supply. We should read widely, works of solid as well as of imaginative worth; we should read slowly, carefully, digesting as we read, mentally testing opinions and judgments or entering imaginatively into the visions of the poets, prophets and seers who lay open to us the piled treasures of their visions.

We should use their gift, applying the test of their creed of nobility and honor to the life we know; we should read, too, the complaints of the disillusioned, the scorn of the cynic, the comment of the shrewd observer of life, the prophecies of orators, never accepting unquestioningly ideas that we do not fully understand, or allowing ourselves to be blinded to the truth by the beauty of phrase and style.

It is necessary to exercise wisdom, judgment and forethought in planting the mind as in planting the garden. We can select what we will grow in the one as much as in the other; we can avoid the undesirable, root out the objectionable, cultivate what is native and beautiful, implant what is alien but lovely. The good gardener, before he sows his seed, cleans up the soil, extirpates weeds and en-

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riches the earth; and in the same way the wise man first purges his mind of all that is harmful, up-roots false ideas, prejudices, ugly ways of judging, and strives to make his intellect ready for the thoughts that he wishes to encourage to grow there.

It is difficult, sometimes, to do this, as it is occasionally a question of hard work to prepare the soil of a garden. Bad habits of thought, like bad habits of body, go deep; they have thrust long roots down into the far corners of our minds, and it needs diligence in the seeking as well as patience in the uprooting, to extirpate them utterly. "Diligence in the seeking"—for weeds have sometimes a fictitious beauty of their own, and some of our prejudices and false ideas seem to the unthinking man so natural, so obvious, so inevitable, that it never occurs to him to test their value. But, with the mind as with the garden, there is not room for all. If we would fill our minds only with what is true, useful and beautiful, we cannot spare space for what is trivial and worthless. We should appraise the ultimate worth of what is there, and ruthlessly tear out all but the best.

What, then, are these false weeds of thought? They are all those beliefs, ideas, conceptions that we hold without reason. It was once very wisely

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said that "No opinion that has not been tested is worth the holding." Nothing whose value and truth have not been proved by due appraisal should be allowed to remain in the mind. We should submit our mental growths to as rigorous an inspection as that which the horticulturist gives to his plants, and, like him, uproot all that are not worth while. We should accept nothing blindly or on trust. Of every opinion we hold, we should from time to time ask ourselves, "Why do I think so? Is it really true?" and do our very utmost to answer honestly.

Then there are other ugly, harmful thoughts—rancorous, ungenerous, spiteful, cunning thoughts—which some men and women encourage to grow in their minds. These people sometimes even seem to take a morbid pride in them, display them freely, draw attention to them. It is exactly like seeing a gardener exhibit a nettle or thistle of monstrous growth, asking proudly, "Don't you even see a finer specimen of a weed than that?" Too much self-analysis is dangerous, it is true; but every man who cares for developing his mind to its fullest extent should, every now and then, make as it were a tour of inspection of it. He should examine it in every detail, decide what is precious, what worth keeping, what definitely harmful, what worthless,

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and should treat each thought according to its merit, encouraging the valuable and destroying the noxious and unprofitable.

And then, when the soil is prepared, free of falsity, rich in possibility, comes the time of planting. What shall we grow in this mental kingdom of ours? What thoughts, theories, opinions, virtues, are desirable? To what can we with advantage devote most space?

Perhaps the most important quality to cultivate is clear-sighted honesty of thought. Lacking this, we lack all, for without it we cannot tell true from false, ugly from beautiful, precious from worthless. We must learn to look at our own hearts and minds with clear, unprejudiced eyes. That is the first requirement of self-cultivation, the light as of the sun, without which nothing good can grow. Then come all the other beauties—generous judgment of others, imaginative vision, intelligent and ordered reasoning, vigorous and original consideration of the varied problems of life and society, simplicity, courage, humility. All these qualities are as necessary to thought as they are to action.

But the mind is not only a lovely and profitable garden. It is also the workshop, the factory, by means of which the business of our life goes on.

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That workshop must be well stocked, efficient, up-to-date. We must know what others are thinking and saying, what tools there are new in the market since first we put in our equipment. In other words, we must discover what new ideas are springing up, what new theories being advanced, and, like the enterprising engineer, be ready to test them and, if they prove valuable, to adopt them. We must try to become acquainted with the best that other minds have to offer, and, with what we gain from them, store our own minds. We should read and listen much, talk and question when we need. We must learn to reason logically, accurately and swiftly, to make wise and firm decisions, to see new ideas with sympathy as well as with sense, to take what is valuable and forget what is false or chimerical.

But the mind is not to be regarded solely as a productive agent. It is also a pleasaunce, a quiet chamber for repose and reflection. Just as we plant trees and flowers for fruit, beauty and fragrance, and furnish rooms to gratify our sense of the restful, the gracious and the friendly, so should we treat our minds. Our thoughts should be selected with as much care as the furniture of a connoisseur. Nothing jarring, nothing unseemly, nothing out of keeping, should be allowed to mar

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the quiet grace of the whole. Like our rooms, our minds should be places of tranquillity, filled with things useful and pleasant to contemplate, offering, too, a welcome to our friends.

We can be hospitable with our minds as with our houses; and that hospitality will be as gratefully recognized and returned if it supplies (as it should) the eternal craving for refreshment and rest. And, just as the interior decorator of a house sets about his task, so should a man or woman set about the furnishing of the mind. Thought-colors should be as harmonious, ideas as original and fresh, the whole effect as beautiful, the ordering as careful, in the one as in the other. No jealousy or bitterness should spoil the general atmosphere of peace, no stereotyped or careless arrangement of thought mar its individuality. Like the ideal room of a gracious home, the mind should be lovely, fresh, and fragrant.

The material of thought may be found everywhere—in the people, in books, in newspapers, in oratory, in art, in nature—in a word, in Life. Just as the man who would plant a garden or equip a workshop or furnish a room will examine, consider the varied and vast quantity of materials offered for his selection, so should the man who would make the best of his mind. He should look

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over the immense mass of thought-matter offered to him on every side; he should test the truth, beauty, sense, originality, of the ideas that he finds, and should refuse absolutely to accept any but the best. For of the best there is enough and to spare to fill any man's mind. In reading, he should select only good books for study and delight, and among the untried moderns he should, like a new Diogenes, seek with the lantern of sincerity for what is true as well as original, beautiful as well as new. His newspaper reading should be even more discerning. He should beware of the meretricious style, the shallow thought, the false reasoning, that mar so large a proportion of the daily press. He should avoid becoming one of that large public who base their whole fabric of thought on a falsehood accepted as true "because it was in the paper."

In friendship and in conversation he should be equally discriminating. There are certain men and women—all too many—who, by an arrogant air of certainty, a scornful refusal to admit the possibility of their being in error, a contemptuous dismissal of the opinions of those who happen to disagree with the conclusions they have accepted or formed, are generally considered clever, original, even profound, thinkers. Very rarely are they

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any of these. Such folks are to be found in any rank of life, from the professional pseudo-philosopher who has the ear of the public to the tipster who is positive that he "knows the winner." None of them should be taken at his own valuation. Their ideas may be valuable, but also may be worthless; test them, and find out; accept what is true, wherever you find it; reject what is false, even if it should come from the lips of the greatest of human kind. Only by so rigorous a selection can you create for yourself a gold standard for the trade of your kingdom.

There is a social, as well as a personal, satisfaction to be gained by this cultivation of the mind. A fine intellect, stored with ideas, with a high standard of truth and beauty, is rarer even than a face of perfect beauty; and it is even more earnestly sought. Ruskin, in his *Sesame and Lilies*, said something of the way in which culture led one into the finest society; and there is a literal as well as a metaphorical truth in that saying to-day. The truly cultured man will find the door of every section of good society open to him; he is welcome everywhere, with rich and poor, great and small, high and low.

For to be truly cultured means that one has made the utmost of one's capabilities in every di-

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rection. One has developed sympathy as well as honesty of thought, so that contempt for folly or ignorance vanishes in the effort to draw out the best in any companion; humility is a feature of the cultured man, for he knows enough to know his own limitations; he is just, for he has learned to be broad-minded; he is generous, for he loves to give of the treasures he has acquired by his own diligent efforts after truth; he is kind, for he can understand the circumstances of his neighbors; he is honest with others in word and deed, because he has schooled himself to be honest with himself.

There are many signs by which speech betrays ugly or deficient thought. The man who cannot think coherently, who allows his talk to wander among parentheses or degenerate into a series of loosely connected platitudes, who flits without the smallest real connection from topic to topic, who monopolizes the conversation, who introduces a mass of irrelevant detail into the simplest anecdote—all betray, unwittingly, not so much actual weeds in the garden of his mind, as utter barrenness of soil. We all know the type of talker who begins, perhaps, to speak of prohibition, and, without ever really discussing the question, or allowing any one else the opportunity of doing so, wanders on, through the wines of France and Italy to Venice,

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thence to the Old Masters, on to the fabulous price lately paid for a Titian or Raphael, to sales of other curios, including autographs, and so to a series of foolish anecdotes of those personages whose autographs he has himself obtained.

We know, too, the talker—common to both sexes and all nations—who, when asked such a simple question as, “Have you seen So-and-so lately?” replies, “Oh, yes—well, not so very lately—I saw him—let me see, which day was it? I rather think it was Thursday—no, it wasn’t, it was Friday—or was it Wednesday? Yes, it must have been Wednesday, because I remember it was the day I was going out to see my sister, and I’m sure that was a Wednesday. Oh yes, I remember perfectly well now—it was Wednesday. I saw him at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-first Street—or maybe it was Fortieth Street—I can’t be quite sure now which it was. Not exactly at the corner, either, you know, but just a few yards away, because I remember that he stepped out of that big place there—what’s its name—you know the place I mean—” and so on, in maddening reiteration and hesitation.

Such people, when they move among those who are even a little cultured, are naturally written down as ignorant bores. Bores they certainly are;

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ignorant, not invariably. Many of them really have something to say—only they have never learned to arrange their thought in an orderly, logical progression, and the consequence is that they cannot do so when they speak.

We have sometimes met persons who, while saying little, somehow seem to spread all about them an aura of graciousness, tranquillity and warmth, like the "blessed light of the sun." We know how, in their presence, unkindness, triviality, folly, seem to wither and die, and how instead there spring general harmony and gentleness of speech, manner and thought. They rule their own minds with royal sway, and their influence is such that others try almost instinctively to emulate their example.

The study of vocabulary-building is vitally connected with the subject of conversation. Many men and women are content to go through life using twenty or thirty adjectives to describe every scene, emotion, person or idea that they meet. Tho we may make ourselves understood in this way, good English conversation requires far more precision than that. To take one example only, it is, in a limited sense, true to describe a primrose, a dandelion, sand and mustard all as "yellow"; but everybody knows that these four are really of quite different colors. The artist in words

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might fitly describe the dandelion's tint as "a rich, fierce gold," while to apply the same words to the primrose would be absurd; or he might speak of the "sharp, crude yellow" of mustard to distinguish that particular shade from the pale yet mellow warmth of sun-kissed sand. And adjectives are by no means the only parts of speech in which many—indeed, most—people appear to be deficient. We make, for example, the commoner verbs do far more than their fair share of work. When we must make ourselves more comprehensible, we usually confine ourselves to qualifying these with one of a few threadbare adverbs.

It is not entirely that we do not know that there is a much larger—an almost inexhaustible—stock of words lying ready for our use—words in which we could fitly describe almost any shade of meaning; it is rather that we are unaccustomed to use these, just as a lazy or unimaginative housewife may produce the same meals day after day and week after week, simply because she is "used" to one set of dishes and lacks the originality to make another. Should we meet such a woman, we should have only one word for her—stupid. Yet many of us do precisely the same thing by our language! We have the ingredients; we know that the result of using them can be infinitely varied and attrac-

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tive; but we keep to the same few expressions because we are too lazy or too limited to try to do anything else.

What is the reason of this limitation? There are, as a rule, two causes for it—ignorance and diffidence; it is interesting to remember that in Spenser's *Faërie Queene* Diffidence was the daughter of Ignorance! Either we do not know of other words to use, or, knowing them, we are shy about using them. The latter is generally the commoner reason, tho neither is a very good excuse for slipshod speech or limited vocabulary. Ignorance can be remedied by reading; diffidence can, and should, be overcome by a little courage and persistence.

It is, we all know, a difficult thing to try to raise one's level in anything. The man who becomes conscious that his company is inferior in moral worth, and tries to raise his own personal standard, is jeered at as a hypocrite or a prig; the man who sets himself a higher standard of physical discipline and culture than his friends has to expect a certain amount of sneering, and to be set down contemptuously as a "crank"; the man who thinks for himself, instead of subscribing to the general and unthinking run of opinion about him, is looked at askance; and the man who tries to raise the general level of his familiar conversation may—and prob-

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ably will—be called on to endure a certain amount of criticism and even of censure. If he is vacillating, dependent for his comfort on the approbation of his fellows, he abandons the effort, and falls back into the old familiar hackneyed jargon of his associates. But, unless he is an utter weakling, he will not be content. The talk that goes on around him, in which he joins, will not satisfy him. Always he will be aware of its faults, its crudities, its banality, its jarring ugliness; never can it fulfil that struggling desire for what is beautiful which he has tried to repress—in vain.

How, then, should a man go to work who wishes to have the best, not only for himself, but for his children and his home? There can be only one answer to that. What would he do if, let us say, beauty or health or riches were his for the taking if only he would persist in working for them? Would any man hesitate? What would he care what hard names were given him if, by honorable persistence, he could win for his family health or a lovely home or a comfortable income? Would he not call himself a craven if he gave up the struggle on account of a possible sneer? There is no real difference between such a man and one who abandons his efforts to win for himself and for his children the opportunity of knowing and using

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good speech. It is our birthright; why should we be ashamed of it? It may—it will—take effort to obtain; but then nothing is worth having that is not worth working for.

Ruskin compared the search for knowledge with the search for gold. "Be sure," he says, in *Sesame and Lilies*, "be sure that you go to the author to get at his meaning, not to find yours. And be sure also that if the author is worth anything, you will not get his meaning all at once; at his whole meaning you will not arrive for a long time. . . . They do not give themselves by way of help, but by way of reward." Gold, he continues, might have been set in easy and accessible places; "but nature does not manage so; she puts it in little fissures in the earth; you may dig long and find none; you must dig painfully to find any."

True—most true, both of the search for gold and the search for knowledge; but the search for good speech is not so arduous. It is, in itself, delightful. It is merely because we are unused to it that we find any difficulty about it; just as a sport, which at first beginning seemed hard, toilsome, perhaps dangerous, becomes in time a sheer delight. Just as practise makes the difficulties vanish and enhances the pleasure of achievement in the world of sport, so it is with speech. As soon as we ac-

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custom ourselves to the sound of good and expressive words and phrases instead of the common meaningless ones in current use, we shall, like the man who is used to delicate flavors or fine shades of color, shrink almost with repulsion from what is coarse or stupid or ugly in speech.

The actual practise of good spoken English will be the only feature of its acquirement that will cause anyone any real trouble. As in sports one wants an opponent to try one's skill, so in conversation one needs a collaborator—one who will not only listen and sympathize, but who will talk as well, and talk to the best of his ability. In the home circle such a person should be found; and this is one reason why English in the home should be not only more necessary but easier of accomplishment than it is anywhere else. But should the unlikely happen, and the right person be not forthcoming, the next best substitute is a silent friend—the pen. To write instead of to speak is perhaps more laborious, but it has also a few advantages even over spoken conversation; and it answers so good a purpose that even those who can find a "talking companion" will do well to cultivate the pen also. For writing allows one to elaborate one's thoughts, to try words and phrases, to alter freely, to be sure of saying exactly what

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one means; it is impossible there to leave a blank for the sympathetic friend to fill in; you cannot say, "You know what I mean," and leave it at that. You have to *say* what you mean; and that is what makes the discipline of the pen so valuable to the man or woman who is anxious to learn this best means of self-expression, right speech.

As with spoken words, it is generally only the lack of habit that makes writing appear laborious. To the shy speaker, its advantages are manifold. He learns to express himself without fear of criticism; he learns confidence, ease, fluency. And, to revert to the simile of sport, just as to become proficient in any form of physical or mental exercise, the best way is to do a little at a time, but to do that little often, so this should be applied to the exercise of improving one's English by use of the pen.

Perhaps the best way of all is to keep a diary; not a mere jotted record of engagements or events, but an account, as accurate as you can make it, of some significant personal experience of every day. It has been truly said that every day brings an adventure to every man. A chance conversation, a small incident observed, an interesting or attractive face, a glimpse of beauty, a thought that is new—any of the myriad tiny events of each day

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will do; and, in the recollection of the day with this in view, one will find with surprize how much that is interesting goes on in the most humdrum of lives. Take any such detail; write of it carefully, in the best words at your disposal, and try to make it live again in the written word. Do not allow yourself to be satisfied with the obvious word or phrase unless you are sure that it is really the best for your purpose, the truest, the most apt, the most vivid.

Such a daily noting of life can be made into a record of life itself—a record which can recreate what is past and gone as nothing else (save, perhaps, the sketches of an artist) can do. And, incidentally, the man who does this builds up for himself not only a storehouse of memory but also a treasury for every-day use—a real acquaintance with English which will soon become both an unconscious habit and a conscious delight and resource.

Besides the diary, letters written to near and sympathetic friends are very valuable in enforcing a lucid, accurate expression of ideas and opinions, as well of events. This is a more intellectual exercise than the former, tho the diary might well include not only an account of objective impressions but also an expansion of more abstract ideas that

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occur to one throughout the day. To discuss ideas with a friend—to try to make another see, through the force of the written word, what is going on in one's mind—is an admirable exercise in the use of accurate, logical English. Debating societies and other similar activities are also invaluable in giving practise in the easy, fluent use of good grammatical English; in fact, the man or woman who really wishes to become “educated,” in the true as well as in the technical sense of the word, will find opportunities everywhere.

It may, perhaps, be asked what is the good of all this study? Life is short, and there is much to be done in the time. The ordinary, average man gets on very well with his speech of every day. He doesn't need to talk “good English” to get through his business and conduct his affairs either at home or abroad. There's more than enough to do and to think about without all this extra study and working at a thing which we can afford to neglect.

That is not quite accurate. The average man remains average precisely on account of this attitude. It is partly, at least, because of his failure to recognize the importance of his own tongue that he does not do more with his opportunities. The man who is a real master of his mother language has an advantage which nothing else can

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quite give him. In business he can explain himself easily and accurately, with readiness, economy and judgment. He has no need to repeat himself, to hunt about for the word he wants to express his meaning; he is assured, prompt, pleasant to listen to. His conversation gives at once the impression of a man who "knows." The most commercial-minded, materialistic business men are beginning to realize this, and to insist on a sound knowledge of really good English from their employees. But it is a matter of habit, and it is the man who habitually speaks well, at home, in the office, at work, at play, and *all the time*, who alone can fulfil the requirements of business. It isn't a thing you can slip off and on at will; it is not so much a garment as a skin—a physical feature, which is part of the man, expressive of his personality.

Socially, the importance of good speaking cannot be overestimated. The voice and general tenor of a man's conversation are very safe tests of his whole personality. There are, as we all know, people who have two distinct manners and voices—one for "company" and one for home use. But such people are very easily recognized and set down for what they are—poseurs, aping what they cannot be troubled to acquire in reality. The artificially "refined" voice will, in moments of

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excitement, broaden and grow strident. The restraint, being unaccustomed, will relax, and vulgar words or phrases slip out. The vocabulary is as limited as the ideas it tries to express; grammatical lapses occur, ignorance and vanity become apparent at every turn. For the truth of the matter is that, try as they will, very few people—perhaps none—can successfully maintain a pose or manner that is not habitual. Sooner or later the mask is bound to slip, and the real person—the person of home life—appears. It depends on the home life what kind of person that is.

To succeed, then, whether in business or in society, as that most attractive of beings a good conversationalist, the *habit* of easy, pleasant, educated conversation must be formed at home. When a man acquires something valuable or beautiful, he does not, unless he is quite extraordinarily devoid of ideals and affection, desire to keep it only for the material benefits it may bring. He does not keep his best things only for his business or social acquaintances; he shares them with his family. Especially is this the case if, by using them at home, he inspires his children to know and love and seek after the same desirable possessions. No one hangs his finest pictures in his office; he takes them home and shares them with his family and friends. One

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does not give to one's acquaintances the best of one's health or strength or thoughts; these one keeps for one's family. The same natural principle should apply to that gift which is everyone's right to have if he will try for it, and which only increases with use—the gift of good speech. If it is worth acquiring at all, it is worth using constantly; and, like all habits, good or bad, the more it is used the easier and more natural it becomes.

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VI

FLIPPANCY AND SLANG

MANY persons of matured years believe that the younger generation of to-day are utterly lacking in respect for their elders. They are held to take a flippant view of many things, to have no regard for the standards of their forefathers, to believe that the experience of the past is stuffy nonsense, to have an overweening confidence in their own self-sufficiency. Never before, we are told, have youths and maidens had so little heed of parental authority, such freedom of action, such independence of thought and speech.

In all ages there have been disobedience and resentfulness; but when they were detected and perhaps punished, the offenders had some sort of feeling of regret and remorse. But now the attitude has in many cases changed. This is especially true of young girls. If they have done something which shocks their parents, they do not accept reproof with "I promise never to do it again."

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They believe their conduct was quite justifiable. They may even proclaim this boldly. They declare they are of the modern age, "in the foremost files of time"—that "old notions are fudge." The careful maxims of prim propriety, of maidenly reserve, of downcast eyes, of shy demeanor, of classic correctness of speech, are part and parcel of an outworn age, they say. With the automobile, the radio, moving pictures, the spread of higher education, the human race is enjoying a new and swift civilization. Change and improvement are the order of the day. Conservatism of the aged is a relic of the past that ought to be buried.

Oddly enough, there is apparently less alarm over the male adolescent than over the female of the species. Boys have always had abundant animal spirits, and these have been expected to lead at times to mischief and misconduct. Indeed, a boy who was absolutely obedient, who never did anything to distress his parents, would be rather too good for this workaday world. Many a father has had a pride, secret if not expressed, when his son came home with torn garments and a bruised nose, obtained in a fight in which the other fellow got the worst of it.

But the sisters have always been brought up with more care, have had an extensive and intensive set

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of tabus, have continually had dinned into their ears that it was not "ladylike" to say this and to do that. They must be prim and neat in attire, conduct, and conversation. Yet in spite of this solicitude, it is the young girls of to-day who display the most distressing freedom of speech.

Of course, in all this, due allowance must be made for the tendency of the aged to take a roseate view of the days of their youth. Food is not so well cooked as it used to be, manners have degenerated everywhere, flippancy has replaced serious thought. Criticism of the young has been repeated by the sages of every generation. An early expression of it goes back to Socrates, more than twenty-three centuries ago. He inveighed against the disobedience of the children of his day.

Obviously, all these complaints could not have been warranted. If the boys and girls had been steadily getting worse through all these ages, they would long ago have reached an impossible stage, where the progress of the race would have turned to retrogression. Really we must take into account the prejudices of maturity, that normal inclination to think one's own generation better than that which is succeeding it. Basically, human nature can have changed little since the classic days of Greece when Socrates and his compeers flourished.

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When all this is considered, the thoughtful observer must yet admit that the young girls of to-day are decidedly what is termed "advanced." Smoking of cigarets and drinking of cocktails are practised by a class which would have been shocked at the mere suggestion in the early days of the century. Fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil—especially evil—has been freely eaten. Conversation spreads to fields which were formerly supposed to be confined to physicians and their patients.

Doubtless it is all a part of what is broadly called the feminist movement. Woman was, in all the early periods of the human race, shamefully down-trodden. She was often a mere chattel, maintained to bear children and to conduct the household. Man made all the laws and he saw to it that his sex reaped full advantage from this. By a system of repression, the distaff side was taught to regard itself as inferior.

But a great awakening has come. The opening of higher education to woman, her entry into the wage-earning class on a large scale, her success in law, medicine, literature, pedagogy, public life, has opened her eyes to the injustice which she so long suffered. Through obtaining the franchise,

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she has been able to influence legislation and to gain what is her due.

Doubtless it is this feminine reaction which has manifested itself in the freedom or license which the so-called "flappers" flaunt in the faces of their elders. Indeed, the phenomena of the adolescent girl have so forced themselves on public attention that the newest edition of the dictionary has had to admit the word "flapper" into its sacred ranks. Oddly enough, the suggestion is there made that the expression may have originated from an allusion to a young duck, or to the braid of hair hanging down the back of a young girl. The barber's scissors have already changed that.

Naturally, the young people have broken out riotously from the old confines of proper speech. "Make it snappy" is the motto of their lives. "Gee! that was a scream," is the common form of praise to replace the former staid, "That was delightful." Garments are no longer pretty or beautiful, but "swell" or "classy." The hostess does not entertain her guests at a reception. She "throws a party." You don't walk to the moving-picture theater. Instead you "leg it" or "hoof it" or "ankle it." The picture itself was not poor or wretched or indifferent. It was "rotten" or "punk." Perhaps "I got a wonderful kick out of it." The argument

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of the professor of English in favor of propriety of speech was mere "bunk." Her hat was not becoming; no, it was not too small; it was "dinky." Maud failed in arithmetic because she was dull—that is, she "flunked" because she was a "dumb-bell." Nobody sends a telegram. They send a "wire" or simply they "wire." They have a "photo" taken, not a photograph. They do not telephone, they "phone." And, of course, there are no degrees of comparison,—everything is "marvelous!"

Our heroine does not become enamored of a young person of the opposite sex. She "falls for him." He becomes not her beau, as of yore, but her "boy friend." She trusts him because he is "on the level" or is "O.K." Everything is "O.K." with her, or she "okayed" the plan for a dance. But they must not invite Jack, because he is a "tightwad." Percy, on the other hand, is "the goods" because he is a "spender." Mabel is not to be thought of; she would "queer any show." Besides, she won't stand "jollyng" or "joshing"—that is, teasing. They "ran me ragged" at that affair, and I was "all in" when I got home. I "sure" was glad to "hit the hay"; perhaps the synonym used was "pound the pillow" or "pound my ear," both of which are obviously inappropriate figures of speech.

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If a suggestion is made that seems prim and old-fashioned, the retort is, "How do you get that way"? You ought to "cut that out" and everything like it. If your remark is not quite intelligible, the reply is, "I don't get you." There are no longer youths or men. They are all "guys." The "grub" at the "feed" was "dandy," or the "eats" were "bully." That was "some" ball game, altho the "gang" did "roast" the "umps." So-and-so is getting too "chesty" and is going to "lose out" if she is not careful. She may "get in bad" with the "bunch." True, she is a "nifty dresser." Isn't Mayme's "kid" sister a "peach"? And so we might go on and on.

It must be admitted that some slang embodies a bright figure of speech, or an odd, grotesque fancy. There are occasions when it seems excusable. But most of it is downright stupid, with no shadow of justification except the stunted intellect of the user. One of the worst of such locutions, not so commonly heard now perhaps as formerly, is "What do you know about that?" One girl says to another:

"Did you hear that Jean was going to be married?"

"What do you know about that!"

This is not a question but an exclamation. The

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intent is merely to express surprise, not to ask further information. The words themselves are utterly inane. It would have been just as rational to say, "Eanie, Meenie, Minie, Mo." But the damsel is not conscious of what she is actually saying. She is simply repeating an expression which she has heard other thoughtless people constantly using.

There may be a shade more reasonableness about "I'll tell the world." The first time one heard that used to emphasize a statement it perhaps had some force. But it was not particularly clever. Said over and over again, especially in connection with trivial matters, it loses whatever picturesqueness it may have had and becomes silly. Can you imagine anything more inappropriate than such an exclamation as: "I'll tell the world that's a good apple"?

An absolute rule against all slang would be extreme. It would be futile, to begin with, for dubious colloquialisms at times pass lips which are ordinarily sealed against them. The newspapers of the country stated that Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes of the Supreme Court of the United States saw a portrait of some old worthy in a public building in Boston and said, "That guy was my grandfather."

Small wonder that the reporters seized on this

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remark as a choice morsel. Justice Holmes was nearly ninety at the time, besides being a son of the beloved Autocrat of the Breakfast Table and representing the finest traditions of learning and culture which Harvard University and New England afford. His sally was humorous and made the old boy seem delightfully human. But no one can imagine him habitually referring to men as "guys."

Then, too, we must allow different standards in business from those in vogue in polite society. "Wire" and "phone" are commonly used in offices. "O.K." as a memorandum of approval is convenient and proper. But in the unhurried intercourse of the dinner-table or the drawing-room, we may expect a little more dignity and polish. "Telegraph" and "telephone" are not such very long words that one wastes much time in employing them. "She 'okayed' all I did" somehow strikes the ear offensively. Why not say, "she approved all I did"?

Doubtless people of refinement sometimes let down the bars a little. But when once you err on the side of laxity, you tend to wander farther and farther astray. It is safer to be even a bit too straightlaced.

We should remember that a number of words now safely ensconced in the dictionary were for-

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merly classed as slang. "Hobo" is an example of this; so are "mob," "graft," and "crestfallen." Apparently if there is legitimate need for a word, it in time is adopted as quite proper. The process is like that described by the lawyer Gamaliel in the Book of Acts. He advised against persecuting the Christians; if their religion was good, it would flourish; if it was not, it would die out.

Even the purist might be forgiven a sneaking liking for "tightwad." It is a picturesque figure of speech. Once in a while it might be allowed if accompanied by a smile and an intonation which were equivalent to quotation marks. But the habitual use of the word is not to be defended. The best joke in the world becomes wearisome if it is heard over and over again. So it is with any vivacious phrase. After its first hearing it loses its zest. Each repetition becomes more and more banal. Such a practise indicates a lack of familiarity with the English language. With the tens of thousands of words contained in an unabridged dictionary, surely there is plenty of good material from which to fashion sentences and to express ideas.

Some one spoke of a stupid girl as a "dumb-bell." Here was a vivid imagination at work. Look at one of these implements and fancy it the expressionless, wooden face of a young woman. The

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metaphor, you see, is appropriate and striking. The locution is further suggestive because "dumb" is colloquially used in the United States for "dull" or "stupid," altho this meaning is not valid in good speech. The similarity between "bell" and "belle" also adds piquancy to the jest. But after you have heard this metaphor a few times, the novelty and cleverness wear off. Occasional slang which exactly suits the case may add spice to the conversation. But too much spice ruins the dish.

Young women whose educational and cultural advantages have been limited, pepper their speech with catchwords and phrases because they know no better. Their companions follow this fashion, and not to do so might be thought snobbish. But the motive of those who come from refined households, and are perhaps taking a college course, is apparently a desire to be smart. They imagine that their charm is enhanced if they sprinkle their conversation with phrases like "I don't get you," "I got in bad," and so on; that they thus appear animated, vivacious, sparkling. The result is just the opposite. By imitating the ignorant classes of the community, they simply lower themselves. It may be that a few kindred spirits find the froth and foam admirable. But worth-while people will give only their disapproval.

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One unfortunate result of such degraded speech is that it may yield a false impression of your origin. All of us who are brought up by cultured parents are justly proud of the fact. Our associates see in us the intangible but nevertheless real effects of good breeding and training. But a flabby, coarse, cheap habit of speech belies all such early influences.

People who do not know about your family naturally conclude that it could not have been of gentle antecedents. Hostesses who might help you very much socially are a little doubtful about you. "She's a nice girl, but——"

There are still numbers of young girls whose home influences, family tradition and good sense tell them that refinement in language is vital to winning the highest regard of people who really count. With a large fraction, the use of what are called "up-to-date" styles of expression is a mere pose. This is shown by the fact that in recitations in the class-room or in speaking with professors and other persons of whom they stand in awe, they can use language of classic purity. Slang is not really ingrained, as it is among shopgirls whose home advantages have been limited. But these maidens, who can be so circumspect in dealing with the professor of English literature, will drop into

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their customary vernacular with other less exalted persons who may nevertheless quite strongly disapprove of verbal sloppiness.

Psychologists and moralists would tell us that lapses from rectitude in one field have a tendency to lead to misconduct in others. A young woman who is vulgar in speech may the more readily slip into commonness in other respects. If she adopts the idea that "I don't give a hoot," "Oh, boy!" "Good night!" and similar expressions are smart and render her more attractive, she may seek to be admired for her forwardness in smoking cigarets, in drinking cocktails, in permitting what is technically known as "necking," and in taking part in conversations which delicacy should forbid. Of course, many girls who are given to slang obey the proprieties in other respects. But transgression along one line undoubtedly encourages it along others. And contrariwise, scrupulous attention to the niceties of speech will foster and stimulate correctness of manners and conduct in general.

No sensible person would suggest that our young femininity should talk with the prim preciseness of an elderly maiden aunt. The period of adolescence and early womanhood should abound in vitality and playfulness which should be reflected in speech. A gay, vivacious manner is quite in keep-

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ing with the late teens and the early twenties. Youth should be as carefree as possible, as long years of trials and burdens are ahead of it. But a healthy flush of animal spirits need not involve a flow of pert speech, abounding in far-fetched metaphors and phrases which have no meaning other than that temporarily and arbitrarily attached to them.

Another difficulty suggests itself. Suppose that we allow a young woman who is in college a certain latitude of expression. Is she, on marrying, suddenly to become staid and proper in her language? This is not likely. There may be a tendency toward greater carefulness, but a complete reversal is not usual. If she has children, as they learn to talk they will inevitably pick up her expressions. The faulty ones seem to have a burr-like quality of sticking. The little ones form habits of negligent speech which will cling to them into maturity and be a social and perhaps business handicap through life.

Closely interwoven with this subject of choice of words is that of enunciation. Where a young woman derives her vocabulary from the dictionary pure and undefiled, she will be likely to speak clearly and intelligently. But the slang habit is naturally associated with slurring of words. One

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cannot say which is the cause and which the effect—which was the egg and which the hen. Probably both faults arise from the same lack of culture or the same desire to be smart. Perhaps the suggestion that young girls are more given to running their words together in a scrambled mass than are those of the other sex could not be definitely proved; but the impression seems warranted that the feminine mind, being quicker and more nervous, is marked by more rapid speech.

The sisters of a family are expected to be neater in attire and person than their brothers, and by the same token, to be more circumspect in their speech. The very same enunciation would therefore seem worse coming from feminine than from masculine lips. We naturally look for primness and correctness in girls. That is one reason why poor speech in them is particularly distressing.

A young woman in New York was heard to say that a certain address was in "Hun-twen-foi-street." She had condensed the seven syllables of one hundred and twenty-first into three. She was not a shopgirl, but well educated and well brought up.

Perhaps the commonest example of slurring is the use of "to." A number of years ago a couplet came into wide popularity:

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"I don't care if he is a houn'—

You gotta stop kickin' my dog aroun'."

The phrase "gotta" spelled as one word made a great hit. In common speech it seems to have largely replaced the old-fashioned "got to." We also have "gonna go" instead of "going to go," "hadda go," instead of "had to go," and so on.

The object seems to be to depart as far as possible from the dictionary spelling of words, while still enabling your hearers to guess what you mean. "Did you ever see the like" becomes "jever see the like," the first two words being compressed into the single letter "j." "I bet you" is reduced to "betcha"; "you bet your life" to "betcher life." "Little" masquerades as "lil." "I might have come" is pronounced "I might of come."

A girl looks blue. "Whassa madder?" asks a sympathetic friend. This process of making hash or Irish stew of words is so common that we take it for granted in certain people. We hardly realize the extent of this mushy pronunciation unless we deliberately watch the speech which we daily hear.

It is likely that the so-called comic strips of the newspapers are in part to blame for our degenerate speech. Questionnaires sent to many thousands of readers show that this feature attracts more attention than any other department of daily journal-

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ism. The humor is very thin. In the effort to enhance it, extreme resort to slang is made, and words are run together in a jumble. The result is to popularize this misshapen, misbegotten speech.

It may not be out of place to suggest that we elder people might do well to revive in some measure the joyous, carefree conversation of youth, which has no thought of mental improvement, but merely is concerned with the pleasure of the moment. Much of our knowledge we gain from a free interchange of ideas with others. Not only do we lay in a store of facts, but we group our acquisitions, draw conclusions from them, learn to reason. But this serious and weighty aspect should not lead us to overlook the Gospel of Recreation as preached by Herbert Spencer. Sport and outdoor enjoyment have their place, and a very important one it is. But we also need diversion of the intellect which is refreshing and restful. Of such agreeable and beneficial pastimes, none is more widely employed than conversation.

Robert Louis Stevenson in his essay on "Talk and Talkers" tells us that "talk, which is the harmonious speech of two or more, is by far the most accessible of pleasures. It costs nothing in money; it is all profit; it completes our education, founds

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and fosters our friendships, and can be enjoyed at any age and in almost any state of health."

Here then we have a delight which is always at hand. Kindly providence has vouchsafed it to poor and rich alike, to young and old, to weak and strong, to the dullard and the genius, to the vigorous and the bedridden. It is a perennial spring of entertainment. To be enjoyable, it need not be witty or learned or graceful or important. It is the commonest link that joins human beings in companionship and fellowship. An apparently idle interchange of gossip about the weather, a new dress or the score of yesterday's baseball game, has its place in making life more livable.

If even the commonplace can thus lift us out of the ruts of loneliness, how much more choice is the talk which is enlivened by fun. A good story at the dinner table is a boon rivaling the finest viands in deliciousness. Spontaneous wit is even rarer and more precious. In a discussion of the causes of panics or of the place of Latin in education, a humorous sally is not out of place. It may even throw light on the question at issue; it lessens tension when argument waxes so warm that it is in danger of arousing personal feeling.

The gravest men, those whose minds are taken up with the weightiest tasks, are not above idle,

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even flippant conversation. Robert Browning was a scholar of great erudition—one of the most learned men in England. His intimates described him as lacking in humor. Before his marriage to Elizabeth Barrett, and after her death, he was famous as a diner-out. If conversation lagged when he was of a company, it was customary to challenge his oft-repeated boast that he could find a rime for any word in the English language and put it into verse. He usually guaranteed to do this in less time than his listeners used in selecting the word.

Of course, he turned out a lot of awful doggerel, but the surprising thing is that he was actually proud of some of it. He took pains to preserve the lines recited in response to the suggestion that he put Timbuctoo into verse:

“Ah, massa, such a fiery ’oss
As him I rode in Timbuctoo.
He would not suit a quiet boss!
Him kick, him rear, and him buck too!”

Tennyson, the Poet Laureate, would hardly pass as a jocund figure. Just imagine his challenging Browning to find a rime for “rhinoceros.” The result was bad enough, the quatrain ending with the words, “he can toss Eros.”

We can get the full effect of this childish play-

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fulness, to put the case mildly, by remembering that Browning was the most obscure of poets. Sometimes he himself did not know the meaning of what he had written. Tennyson said of "Sordello":

"I understood only the first line and the last, and both were lies." The man whose poems wrinkled the brows of a hundred Browning Societies could yet turn out stuff like this:

"The plate was large, the eggs were four;
He breakfasted, there was no more."

Surely the rest of us are to be forgiven if we mingle a little nonsense with our talk once in a while.

VII

The Part the Voice Plays

VII

THE PART THE VOICE PLAYS

THE art of conversation is, in one way, like the art of music. The musician has his theme, which he elaborates and expresses in notes and harmonies of notes; and then an instrument renders it audible to the world. The conversationalist has his matter, which he puts into words and combinations of words; and those words are then made audible by means of the instrument of the voice.

A good speaking voice is essential to the enjoyment of conversation, as a well-played instrument is essential to the enjoyment of music; and a good speaking voice is by no means common. Indeed, the speaking voice perfectly adapted to conversation is a rare exception. This is probably due to the lack of definite cultivation, to carelessness in every-day speech, to unconscious imitation of poor or indifferent speakers. Besides this lack of training, many voices suffer from one or more natural defects; and tho the owner is often quite ignorant

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of them, the trained, educated ear is quick to detect and be irritated by them. Thinness of tone, nasal quality, throatiness, harshness, and monotony are among the most common faults.

A really pleasant, sweet voice is, in the majority of cases, nature's own gift; but even those not thus endowed may do much towards acquiring one. By careful observation and proper training of the voice, it may be continuously developed over a long period until it reaches the utmost perfection of which it is capable.

The voice may be irreparably ruined if it is neglected or abused in early life; but if it escapes this peril, its improvement is by no means confined to the years of one's youth. It can be trained, like any other part of the body, at almost any period, altho, of course, the earlier the schooling the shorter and the less difficult it will be. For this reason voice culture was regarded by the Athenians as an essential feature of a full education, and was included in the school curriculum. We, however, are likely to regard our voice as a thing that is "just there," like the weather, and rarely pay any attention to its betterment. Yet that the voice should be cultivated is as necessary as that language should be well chosen, or any other rule of good conversation observed; and it is only when we recognize

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this, and come to observe it attentively, that we realize how many and how common are the faults due to voice alone, and how it can be improved by systematic training.

The speaking voice proclaims the man even more unmistakably than the actual words he uses. Words are derived from a man's thought, his mind; but the tone he employs is expressive of his feeling, his soul, his very nature. It discloses virtues and faults. A whining voice proclaims the selfish, weak character; a strident tone indicates arrogance and self-sufficiency; a drawling voice is the expression of a lazy, indolent temperament; an unnecessarily gruff tone is the mark of a surly, suspicious nature.

Besides this, a good speaking voice is instantly recognized as a mark of culture. Far more often than is suspected is a man judged in daily life by the tone of his voice. The occasion when another first hears it may be important to the speaker—say at a critical interview or social introduction; apart from the actual words that have been spoken, a certain definite impression, favorable or otherwise, is left on the mind of the other person by the quality of the voice he has heard. To the stranger, the voice seems to carry with it something of the very essence, the personality, of its owner.

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Just as no two characters and no two faces are alike, so no two voices are exact duplicates. But every voice may be trained to acquire qualities that will render it infinitely more musical, effective and attractive than its owner suspected was possible. To begin with, a good speaking voice is varied. Like the well-played instrument, it is capable of making judicious changes of key, inflection, pace, force, and quality. "The true management of the voice," says Quintilian, "is partly effected by variety, which alone constitutes an eloquent delivery. . . . The art of varying the tones of the voice not only affords pleasure and relief to the hearer, but, by the alternation of exercise, relieves the speaker. The voice is to be adapted to the subject and feelings of the mind, so as not to be at variance with the expressions used."

From this, it appears that every good speaker must be able to control his voice as easily as the musician does his instrument. And the one is as possible as the other; both depend on the nature of the man. Voice control begins with mental control. A well-poised, flexible, harmonious attitude of mind reflects these same qualities in tone. Your habitual way of thought has a direct bearing on your speaking voice. Too positive or too fixed opinions, an inflexible attitude of mind, tend to

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harden the quality of the voice; a yielding, gentle disposition imparts an agreeableness and attractiveness to the speech which nothing else can effect. Mental composure will do much to keep the voice under proper control. Sudden shrill notes, "breaks," quaverings, betray the ill-balanced, ill-controlled nature.

Of course, the voice must to some extent vary with its owner. One person is by nature earnest, enthusiastic, decided; another is apathetic, indifferent, idle: each has a different lesson to learn. The first should guard against too great eagerness, speed of enunciation, and exaggeration of expression, while the second should deliberately try to develop animation. Well-bred people—gentlefolk—are known by their habitual self-control. They know how to restrain themselves, how to be modest and unassuming, and instinctively avoid any form of verbal vulgarity. They restrain not only their words, but the tone in which these are uttered.

The mind should not only control the voice, but should be in complete harmony with it. When the mind is definite, the voice will also be clear-cut. It is therefore important to the voice itself that the mind should have full command of the subject on which one wishes to speak; only thus can the voice be used with assurance and conviction. And as the

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emotions also play their part in regulating the tone and quality of the voice, they too must be in subjection in order that they may command the channel in which they are to be expressed. And, in close connection with this mental control, there must be physical control—a definite training of the voice, a training which is by no means the same thing as elocution, but which forms the basis for that further specialized art.

First comes the question of pace. Moderately slow speaking is best in ordinary conversation. Never talk fast; nothing is gained by it save a sense of stress and hurry; while slow speech has many advantages. It enables you to think more, to choose your words, to form your sentences correctly, to lay the emphasis in the right place. A measured pace also leads to quietness of tone, which is equally important; there is little tendency to raise the voice unduly when you speak slowly. The modest rate and low-pitched voice impress your hearer favorably and give an added weight to your words, since they suggest the idea of care and deliberation.

Especially is this the case if the conversation is on a debatable topic; your view is likely to receive a better hearing if it bears the imprint of reflection. Besides, it is undignified to speak hastily, to gabble

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like a cataract, as if you were afraid of being cut off before you have expressed what you have to say. Such a speech indicates an erratic, hasty, superficial mind, as well as a self-centered or conceited nature.

Loud, as well as rapid, utterance is destructive of a good speaking voice. If you naturally speak too fast and too loud, train yourself to slow down; check the tendency whenever you notice it. And similarly, should you be inclined to drag your words, to hesitate too much over their selection, to pause too frequently and too long, you should try to school yourself to speak more quickly and spontaneously. Drawling is as tiring to the hearer as haste.

Boswell, in his *Life of Johnson*, says that the great lexicographer modeled the style and character of his conversation on the advice of Bacon. "In all kinds of speech, either pleasant, grave, severe or ordinary, it is convenient to speak leisurely and rather drawlingly than hastily; because hasty speech confounds the memory, and oftentimes, besides the unseemliness, drives a man either to stammering, a non-plus, or harping on that which should follow; whereas a slow speech confirmeth the memory, addeth . . . a conceit of wisdom to the hearers, besides a seemliness of

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speech and countenance.” And in consequence of observing this advice, Boswell tells us, Johnson’s conversation was “always most perfectly clear and perspicuous, and his language was so accurate and his sentences so neatly constructed that his conversation might well have been printed without any correction. At the same time, it was easy and natural”—as anyone who knows the *Life* will see from the recorded conversations of the great doctor.

Slow speaking also affords an opportunity to criticize one’s own voice and to improve it. If excitement or interest carries you away, you may sometimes astonish—and horrify!—yourself by the shrill, ugly sound of your own voice.

Speed of speech answers to time in music; and pitch of the speaking voice answers to key. Some people either inherit or develop a voice which is pitched either too high or too low, and unfortunately they commonly either never know this or never trouble to alter it. The average speaking voice is pitched too high, and the first step should therefore generally be to lower it by degrees, and to use the lower registers as much as possible. A low-pitched voice is more resonant and musical than a high one, and is less fatiguing both to speaker and hearer. It is an indication of refine-

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ment and consideration; it is unobtrusive, and gives an impression of gentleness and self-restraint.

The high-pitched voice, on the other hand, suggests hastiness and arrogance. It repels by its very eagerness and insistence. One naturally associates it with such unpleasant qualities as aggressiveness, irritability, nervousness and excitability. One of the axioms of the wise ancient Greeks, as true to-day as it was then, was that the loud or harsh voice betokened lack of breeding. So the man who wishes to speak well should resist every temptation to shout or hurry his speech. He should talk in a calm, easy manner, avoiding all unnecessary physical effort. It is wise to relax the muscles of the throat and mouth and let the voice flow through the lips. Here again, mental control is necessary; for mental poise, habitually maintained, naturally causes one to use the lower tones of the voice, while undue animation and excitement tend to carry the voice to the higher keys. Every time you hear your voice rising shrill, deliberately lower it several keys, and notice the immediate improvement. If this is done whenever the voice rises too high, it will soon be under control.

The use of too high a register is not only unpleasant to one's hearers, but is definitely harmful to the speaker. It puts a strain on the vocal cords and

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muscles; it is not only fatiguing at the time, but results in serious injury to the voice. A high pitch means thin tone; it is monotonous and annoying, and does not allow the speaker any latitude for raising his voice when a real occasion arises for it, such as when he wishes to speak with unusual emphasis or energy. This has, naturally, a cramping, limiting effect, for the true expression of emotion requires a range of voice. Exultation, gladness, elation, defiance and resolution call for the higher registers of the voice; pity, sadness, fear, despair and awe are expressed in the lower ranges. A middle tone, inclining to low, is therefore the best for ordinary occasions, in order to allow of the necessary emotional expression.

Again, in speaking as in music, the tone of the voice and its modulations are most important. A sweet, mellow tone gives a speaker a very considerable advantage, quite apart from the intrinsic value of what he has to say. As soon as he begins to speak, the rest of the company listen to him for the sheer pleasure that his tones can give. Just as the good violinist is known by the tone he can give to his instrument. Like a beautiful face, a pleasant, gentle musical voice exercises a magnetic influence and awakens instinctive sympathy and liking.

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Intelligent people are repelled rather than won by a vehement verbal onslaught. It is the pleasant voice and wooing tone that win. The ancients described the "magnanimous"—*i.e.*, the great-souled—man as "one of subdued and deliberate speech." All appearance of violence, irritability, impulsiveness, was alien to his nature. His easy, self-controlled, pleasant manner was then, as now, the natural outcome of a disciplined and lofty personal character.

The importance of pitch and of flexibility of tone is well realized when one remembers that the tone and manner in which a thing is said may mean as much as the actual content of the words. Take, for example, the single word "No." It is quite simple, and has normally only one meaning—a plain negative. Yet "No" can be so uttered, by variation of the pitch and tone of the voice, that it can mean a variety of different things. This can be proved by saying the word first in a low-pitched voice, then in a medium key, and again at a high pitch. With appropriate tonal quality, it may then mean any one of these things:

No—in a low key—No! I am sorry to hear it.

No—in a medium key—No; that is my definite reply and denial.

No—in a high key—No! You astonish me! Surely it cannot be!

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Whereas the ancient Romans had different word-particles to express different types of question, those expecting the answer "Yes," those expecting the answer "No," and those whose answer was unknown, the more subtle modern implies all these merely by flexibility of pitch and expressive tonal quality of voice. He also often makes a definite statement in an interrogatory tone, as if deprecating absolute knowledge—a device which is far more effective and pleasing than a bald affirmation of fact. It sounds less arrogant if, instead of voicing cold, dogmatic opinions, you infuse into them a kind of indirect question, implied by the tone of your voice. This not only suggests modesty and an open mind, but also has the merit of encouraging discussion and inviting the more diffident members of the company to speak.

Take, as an example, this phrase, raising the voice perceptibly on the last word: "The terms of the Peace Treaty surely cannot be justified." Here you have a definite opinion, but you suggest, by the questioning tone, that you are open to hear what others have to say, that you are prepared to discuss the question. If the emphasis had come on the word "cannot," it would have been an inflexible, dogmatic, perhaps irritating, statement, liable to apply the closure to the topic under discussion at

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once. It is even possible to go further and express a sincere conviction in the form of a question. It is this possibility of varying by tone the exact implication of a sentence that gives the spoken word ascendancy over the written as a method of subtle expression. Whereas the written word carries with it only the actual meaning of the words used, spoken language enables you to express this and far more by the tone in which it is uttered.

Tone also has its effect on the general atmosphere of conversation. Some people habitually talk as if they were in trouble or undergoing some tormenting sorrow. They ask you how you are in a tone suited to high tragedy. Others have weary, depressed voices, others are distinguished by a muffled, gruff tone or a complaining, whining voice. Such people rarely become popular. Whatever the subject of their talk, they spread a depressing, doleful influence. Happy talk consists both of matter and voice. It is infectious; it radiates cheerfulness and is a power for good. It is quite compatible with quietness of tone, for to be blithe and joyous is not by any means necessarily to be hilarious. People who talk happily are likely to live happily, for the habit of speaking in a cheerful tone and normal, pleasant key has a distinct reaction on physical well-being.

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Few faults of the speaking voice annoy others so much, or arouse so much amused contempt, as artificiality. The affected voice that is not natural often alienates those who might otherwise have become your friends. Affectation, which is apparent in pronunciation as well as tone, is particularly noticeable in young men and women, especially those who have just left school or college and feel that they must show how very superior they are. Older people, both educated and uneducated, who ought to know better, are also sometimes guilty of this fault; and it is more unpleasant in them than in the young, for one can nearly always afford an indulgent smile at the harmless follies of extreme youth, while the same follies in those of maturer years appear repulsive. Exaggerated refinement of pronunciation and tone cannot but arouse contempt in those who notice it.

Leaving now the question of tone—the key and pitch in which words are uttered—let us come to the words themselves. Not only choice of words, but the very way in which those words are uttered, is an indication of breeding. A distinct, clear enunciation that yet lacks pedantry or affectation is a sure mark of culture. To acquire this, it is necessary to deliver one's words carefully, giving to each consonant, as well as each vowel, its true

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value. The very fact of doing this tends to make your hearers attend to what you are saying, while the remarks of a person who mutters or gabbles are often passed over unnoticed. It would be far easier to keep a good flow of conversation alive, to avoid listlessness and lack of interest, if people only spoke more clearly and carefully.

Now, this indistinct, foggy enunciation is not only due to lack of training in early life; it is also often due to bad muscular control and especially to the lack of freedom in the use of the mouth, jaws, tongue and lips. In order to get the best out of training in enunciation, one should know something of the way in which speech is produced. What happens is this: The lungs, which hold the breath supply, are the real source of sound. From the lungs a column of air ascends the windpipe, at the top of which, in the throat, is a movable valve or box, called the larynx, whose function is of vital importance.

The opening at the top of the larynx is known as the glottis, and across this stretch the vocal cords or membranes. These are made to vibrate by the air forced through them from the windpipe, and the sound they emit is regulated, in part, by our unconscious action in either tightening or relaxing the cords, exactly as a violinist regulates his note

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by the varying position of his finger on the string of his violin. This sound is, however, immature as yet, and has little power; it increases its volume by passing from the larynx to the resonating cavities formed by the mouth and by the spaces above the roof of the mouth, called the nasal cavities. Here the sound acquires tone, which is regulated into definite word sounds by the action of the tongue as it moves against the palate or teeth, and by the shaping of the lips.

Since so many processes go to make up a word, it is clear that all the organs concerned should function properly. If any one of them is neglected, the voice is bound to suffer. The most important, perhaps, is the origin of the whole thing—the lungs. Regular practise in deep breathing is one of the best means of improving the capacity of the lungs and imparting more power and smoothness to the speaking voice. It has also, of course, a very beneficial effect on the general health of the body, since full inhalations bring into the lungs more oxygen for carrying on the vital processes. Breathing is not entirely automatic; one can exercise conscious control over the muscles which govern it, as well as over those which regulate the actual formation of words (except those of the larynx itself). If these muscles are developed and

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under proper control, the voice will be very greatly improved. The muscles which are used in inhaling and exhaling can ~~be~~ trained just as much as any other group of muscles, and it is only when they are properly exercised that we get the best results from lung power. Breathing practise is also useful as teaching control over the amount of air to be expended in speech.

The issue of too much breath—that is, waste of breath—is one of the chief causes of bad voice control. It can be overcome by the habit of holding a supply of breath in reserve when speaking, so that one does not unexpectedly run short with a gasp and a hurried gulp of breath. Singers are always told to learn to conserve their breath, and this is even more necessary in speaking than in singing, since speaking involves far more work for the vocal muscles than singing.

The late M. Coué, the great French exponent of autosuggestion, said: "There can be no question as to the physiological value of breathing exercises. Whatever promotes physical well-being must obviously provide a solid foundation for mental vigor. The relation between the faculty of breathing and the faculty of attention is well known. These considerations suffice to show the suggestive value of breathing exercises."

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A common fault, and one that should be checked at once in children, is to breathe inwards through the mouth instead of the nose. The nose filters and warms the breath before it reaches the delicate mechanism of the throat; by its passage through the nose the air is also moistened, so that the throat and tongue are not likely to become dry and hard; to breathe thus is the first step towards acquiring purity of tone and ease of speaking.

The following deep-breathing exercises are recommended. They should be practised regularly, in the open air if possible, or before an open window, both morning and evening:

Stand erect, with the chest well forward, the shoulders braced back and the arms by the sides, palms inwards. Slowly raise the arms outward to a vertical position above the head, at the same time taking in a slow, deep breath through the nose, until the lungs are completely full. The hands should remain, palms inward and facing each other, for a few seconds, while the breath is held. Then slowly lower the arms to their original position, releasing the breath gradually through the mouth. Repeat this exercise about ten times, concentrating the mind fully on each action.

Another beneficial exercise is as follows:

Stand erect as before, but with the palms of the

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hands resting on the thighs. Slowly lift yourself on your toes, at the same time raising the arms forward and outward, as if preparing to dive, until they meet above the head, palms forward. Simultaneously with the raising of the arms, take in a slow deep breath through the nose, and hold the breath for a few seconds while you balance yourself on your toes. Let the arms make a wide circular sweep sideways and downwards, slowly, as the heels are gently lowered and the breath is exhaled. Repeat this exercise ten times. It is not only beneficial to the lungs and voice, but the other movements impart poise and balance to the whole body.

A good way of gaging the increased capacity of the lungs after a period of deep-breathing practise is to see how long one vowel sound (say "ah") may be held on one breath. If the lungs are in good condition and the note is emitted quietly, you should be able to sound it for a minute or more.

Then come the muscles of the throat and jaw. If the proper use of these is neglected, the voice is bound to suffer. If you do not give free play to the lower jaw, for instance, muttering is the result. These muscles must be exercised, like any others, if they are to do their work properly. One good way of obtaining freedom of the jaw muscles is to

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imitate yawning. This relaxes the throat muscles and gives flexibility to the lower jaw and the lips, which promotes freedom of voice production. It is a good plan to do this before a mirror, in order to make sure that the mouth is properly opened and rounded—a less simple affair than you would imagine!

Many speakers seem afraid to open their mouths. They forget that the lips, together with the tongue, have the important part to play of making the actual word for which the sound is provided by the breath. To speak with almost motionless lips is to produce a thin, lifeless, monotonous sound, as you will see if you say the following sentences, first with stiff, slightly opened lips, and then with free movements: "Pa told me not to speak to Jane." "Bound with gold chains about the feet of God." You will hear at once how resonant and impressive the vowel sounds appear when they are given free, clear enunciation.

Neglecting the use of the lips is, broadly speaking, an Anglo-Saxon fault. The Latin races have a natural capacity for clear enunciation, and this is particularly noticeable in the French, whose language demands it in a special degree. Indeed, the French never fail to notice our lack of distinct enunciation when we attempt to speak their

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tongue, with the result that the English student of French is soon told to "Faites bien marcher les levres" (Make the lips move well). But enunciation is merely a matter of care and practise, which a few simple rules will soon give if they are constantly practised. The chief of these are:

- I. Open the mouth well.
- II. Speak *through* the throat and not *from* it, keeping the tone well forward in the mouth.
- III. Give full play to the lower jaw, and never speak through the teeth.
- IV. Let the tongue move easily and freely, never tighten it.
- V. Allow plenty of movement to the lips.
- VI. Replenish your breath often, inhaling it through the nose.
- VII. Keep all the muscles concerned relaxed when you speak, especially those of the throat and mouth.

These rules are easy enough if one exercises the proper muscles.

Some useful exercises for the jaws, lips and cheeks are these:

- (I) Open the mouth as widely as possible, forming a large O with the lips. Keep the tongue flat, so that you can see the uvula, or little pointed flap that hangs at the back of the mouth. Close the mouth sharply.

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- (II) Lower the bottom jaw till the teeth are about an inch apart. Stretch the mouth sideways as far as it will go. Hold it in this position for a few seconds, then quickly thrust the lips forward as far as you can, imitating a child's action in pouting.
- (III) With the teeth firmly closed, open the lips so as to show as much as possible of the teeth. Open and shut the mouth, still keeping the lips drawn back.
- (IV) Lower the bottom jaw to its full extent, then raise it briskly, so that the movement of the joints below the ears can be felt. Repeat this until there is no feeling of stiffness or resistance at these joints.
- (V) Open the mouth slightly, and move the lower jaw vigorously from side to side, so that there is a slightly audible sound from the joints behind the ears.

All these exercises should be repeated ten times each, before a mirror if possible, to insure that they are being properly carried out.

The most common faults of enunciation, which these exercises will help to eradicate, are these: Mumbling the words; gliding over, or omitting, syllables and single letters; the indistinct pronunciation of initial and final letters; allowing the voice to sink before the final syllable has been clearly pronounced. The first of these—mumbling—is generally due to the faulty production of vowel sounds. Vowels are the basis of pure and resonant tone, and without this a good speaking voice can-

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not exist. It is an excellent plan to make sure of one's vowels by practising saying the following sounds for a few minutes each day:

ah ay ee aw oh oo

as heard in

far say pea raw low cool

and the short sound of each vowel, as heard in

hat pet hit hot cut foot

If you sing as well as say these sounds, you will cultivate musical tone, which is a very valuable quality.

The habit of mumbling often leads to the second fault, that of dropping syllables or letters altogether. For example, a careless speaker will often say, "Dinny go?" for "Did he not go?" "When yuh coming?" for "When are you coming?" "Com-mear nile tell you" for "Come here and I'll tell you," and so on. If you repeat these, first the wrong and then the correct rendering of each sentence, you will be struck by the pleasant sound of the proper pronunciation, and by the suggestion of education and culture which it conveys. And yet it takes very little extra trouble. It pays to speak clearly, both for your own culture and for the pleasure of your hearers.

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Words in which medial letters are often dropped are the following:

Guv'ment, for Government	Pospone, for Postpone
Jography, for Geography	Labratry, for Laboratory
Elmentry, for Elementary	Missionry, for Missionary
Probyl, for Probably	Reconize, for Recognize
Resination, for Resignation	Medeeval, for Medieval
Monotnous, for Monotonous	Nessry, for Necessary
Calclate, for Calculate	Intrest, for Interest
Stiplate, for Stipulate	Summry, for Summary
Litrachur, for Literature	Vilence, for Violence

And of course there are scores of other such errors, which your own ears will pick out if you are accustomed to speak with a clear enunciation, or will compare the talk of the "man in the street" with that of cultured people.

The omission of initial or final letters is most marked in words beginning with a vowel, such as "'rithmetic" for "arithmetic," and in words ending with -ing or some other combination of two consonants, such as "distric'" for "district." Medial letters which are often dropped are a "d" coming between an "l" and an "s," in words like fol(d)s, chil(d)s, mol(d)s; "d" when it follows "n," in such words as lan(d)lord, gran(d)mother, san(d)wich, splen(d)idly; sometimes a medial "t" in such words as tac(t)less, bo(tt)le, mu(tt)on, cer(t)ainly; and "h" coming after a "w," in words

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like w(h)ile, w(h)en, w(h)ether, w(h)ite; a "g" following an "n" in words like Washin(g)ton, Kensin(g)ton, cunnin(g)ly, haltin(g)ly.

And, in addition to omitting letters, there is a common tendency to insert an "r" between a word that ends with a vowel and a word that begins with one. You often hear people say such things as "I sawr a carpenter trimming the rawr edge of a plank"; "He bought some Californiar oranges"; "The arear of the room is twenty square yards"; "The chinar ornaments and sofar of brocade silk were very handsome." This very ugly fault is a general symptom not only of slovenly speech but also of vulgarity and lack of education.

Closely allied with enunciation is pronunciation, which is absolutely necessary to a good speaking voice. Faulty enunciation sometimes does more than make a voice indistinct; it can even develop into absolutely wrong pronunciation of words, as if the spelling were entirely different. This is often the case when vowels are badly brought out. You sometimes hear people say:

*when they
mean*

Yis	Yes
Conshunce	Conscience
Pashunce	Patience

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*when they
mean*

Elber	Elbow
Lightid	Lighted
Famaly	Family
Visable	Visible
Pidgin	Pigeon

Then there is the equally common fault of accenting the first instead of the second syllable of a dissyllabic word. It is correct to say:

not

Dis-patch'	Dis'-patch
In-vite'	In'-vite
Ad-dress'	Ad'-dress
En-tire'	En'-tire
Ac-cept'	Ac'-cept
In-quire'	In'-quire

Longer words are also often mispronounced by having the stress laid on the wrong syllable. For example, one should say:

not

Com'-par-a-ble	Com-par'-a-ble
Ad-ver'-tise-ment	Ad-ver-tise'-ment
Guar-an-tee'	Guar'-an-tee
Dis'-ci-pline	Dis-cip'-line
In-ex'-plic-able	In-ex-plic'-able
Ma-ture'	Ma'-ture
Clem'-a-tis	Clem-at'-is
Def'-i-cit	De-fic'-it

And of course the "h" aspirate is rather to be over

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stressed than omitted at the beginning of words. There are very few words indeed (such as hour, heir, honor, honesty) in which it is not sounded, and these are quite easily learnt.

One more stumbling-block is the pronunciation of foreign words and phrases, particularly place-names. If one is not sure of the correct native pronunciation, one should learn it; if sure, one should use it, except in those very few cases where towns are so famous that it would sound pedantic to do so. For instance, one should say "Paris" rather than "Paree" in the French manner, tho Paris is a French town; but one should say "Compiègne" with the "yen" sound in the final syllable, like the French. One should not speak of having visited "Firenze," but should use the Anglicized version, "Florence"; and similarly to say "Venice" in the Italian manner would savor of pedantry; but one should say such a name as "Wiesbaden" in the native pronunciation.

Many other common errors of pronunciation will occur to every reader; all may be easily corrected by paying careful attention to the speech of cultured people. It is a good plan to keep a notebook in which you write down any word whose pronunciation puzzles you during the course of the day, later finding out its true pronunciation and

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learning it till you are certain of using it correctly.

Reading aloud is perhaps the best way of cultivating a pleasant speaking voice and finding out one's own errors of enunciation and pronunciation. It is surprising to find, when one begins to do this, how little one has noticed the defects of one's own voice, and how much it could be improved. The musical quality of the voice is greatly improved by reading poetry, or the Psalms, which lend themselves exquisitely to the development of a speaking voice both rhythmic and musical without being singsong. It is also a good plan to read or recite dramatic selections, since this calls for a specially clear and emphatic enunciation, and also develops the range and flexibility of the voice. But it is a mistake to rant over these; they lose their quality and their efficacy if they are not spoken naturally. Hamlet's advice should be borne in mind—"Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines."

Not only reading, but singing aloud, is an excellent exercise for the voice. Any simple air will do, and may either be actually sung or hummed, preferably on a "moo" sound, such as is so much used

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by singers who wish to cultivate the open throat sounds.

Even if you have a naturally weak or defective voice, you need not be discouraged. Exercise of the muscles will do an astonishing amount to strengthen and develop your voice. Demosthenes, one of the greatest of classical orators, suffered from an impediment in his speech and a weak chest during his early years; by adopting special forms of training for each defect, he cured himself completely. Henry Ward Beecher, tho handicapped in youth by abnormal tonsils and a small throat, conquered both drawbacks and became a great pulpit orator. And, with our modern knowledge of physical structure and our long research into the means of overcoming physical handicaps, the speaker of to-day has a hundred aids which were denied to the orators of the past.

But one word of warning is necessary. It is quite useless to try to speak well unless one is ready to admit one's own defects. No one can help the man who is too conceited to admit that he is in need of improvement. You must be thoroughly sincere in examining yourself, thoroughly unprejudiced in appraising your own habits. If you discover something undesirable in yourself, your nature, or that expression of your nature, your voice, it must be

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rooted out, however difficult and distasteful the process may be. Habit is a tenacious thing. It may, and probably will, require a very real effort to exterminate it. But if you know it is there, and know that it is undesirable, you must persevere in the effort to get rid of it. If you do, you will soon be repaid for the trouble in your own pleasure and in the pleasure of your friends. As a conversationalist, you will make great strides.

VIII

The Conversation of Children

VIII

THE CONVERSATION OF CHILDREN

THERE are proverbs which are so true that no one dissents from them. "How obvious!" is the comment on them. "Everybody knows that!" And yet their crystallized wisdom is neglected. A striking example of this folly is the disregard of the old adage, "Prevention is better than cure." Obvious—yes; true and wise—certainly. And yet in every branch of life we find the best endeavors of men and women directed to the cure of evils that a little foresight and common sense would have prevented. Statesmen, doctors, lawyers, ministers, teachers, social reformers—all of these and countless other conscientious, thoughtful people spend their lives in trying to alleviate the troubles that early measures would have nipped in the bud.

The ills that man is heir to are seldom of adult growth. Sickness, poverty, sin, the seeds of all are sown in childhood: for the early development of a healthy mind and body and character would, in

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almost every case, have prevented these—or would at least have kept them from wrecking the whole life of the individual. The truth of this is so apparent that its constant neglect is the more amazing. Just as the seeds of disease may generally be traced to heredity, environment or early training, so, in nearly every case, may the seeds of poverty, sin, and misery. “I never had a chance”—“Circumstances were always against me”—“If only I had been properly trained as a child”—these pitiful regrets are generally true—truer, sometimes, than the speaker knows. And their truth is becoming so universally recognized that all those who are seriously interested in the reformation of social evils, the development of the human race, the regeneration of mankind, are now, more than ever before, concentrating on the training, physical, mental and spiritual, of the children who will soon represent the mankind of the world.

One sees a marked symptom of this preoccupation in the school advertisements that include “Character training” as part of their program. The importance of this looms large in the vision of every serious educationalist; but the teacher can do little without the cooperation of the parent; the school can achieve little without the influence of the home. But all too many parents are willing

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to foist their responsibilities upon the teacher. They read the school advertisements, and they rejoice. "These are experts," thinks the lazy parent. "They have made a thorough study of the subject of character-training. They have all the latest ideas and apparatus. They know how to discipline children properly. I pay large fees for their services—it is their business to turn my child out well equipped in every way."

This is all very true—except in one most important point; namely, that, single-handed, the expert can do little indeed. "Outside" training, however skilful and efficient, cannot compete with continuous influence, unchecked instincts, steady environment, the forces of habit and example. The parent who looks to the school to supply the deficiencies of home training is exactly like the man who consults a medical specialist, pays him enormous fees, exacts the utmost of his skill, and yet continues to live daily a thoroughly unhealthful life, because he believes that his occasional visits to the physician will save him from the consequences of his daily bad habits. Such a man would be set down as lacking sense. Yet the man or woman who believes that an expensive school, however excellent, can save a child from the consequences

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of a bad home training is no less criminally foolish and weak.

The main part—all the really important part—of a child's training must necessarily take place at home. Unless a child's life is spent entirely at school or some similar institution—in which case the institution takes the place of the home—the school is only one factor in the development for which the home is otherwise entirely responsible. The school cannot—and should not be required to—compete with home influences. The home is permanent, the other is only an incident in the child's life. Again, the training that a child gets from its parents and family is a natural training, as contrasted with the artificial one supplied by outside experts; it is not a matter of a few hours or a few weeks, or even of a few years; it is being given, consciously or unconsciously, every minute of the day; it is being absorbed as naturally as air. Consciously applied education by specialists is often excellent and may be extremely valuable; but it has not, and can never have, the power of that constant, unceasing suggestion and example which is the strength of home influence.

The home has yet another advantage over the school in this matter: not only is it a constant and a natural sway, but it begins with babyhood—in

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those impressionable years when the mind is plastic as never again—and it continues after the child is adult. It is never forgotten. It is those early years that are of the utmost importance to the formation of a child's mind. It was an axiom of the Jesuits—one of the most skilled bodies of psychologists in the whole history of education—that all serious training must be done before the age of seven. "Give us a child until he is seven; after that anyone can have the training of him." In other words, he will never forget the lessons absorbed in those early years. No later impression will have the force and permanence of the trend acquired before seven. And modern psychologists endorse that view. They lay the greatest stress on the necessity of controlling a child from the very first; and they agree that lessons learned before the age of seven are never lost. It is in those critical seven years—years that every normal child should spend mainly at home and in the company of its family—that its whole future lies.

That fact should never be forgotten—that in those early years the foundations of a life are laid. Physically, mentally, and psychologically, it is then that the future citizen is made. It is astonishing, to a thoughtful onlooker, to notice how often a parent will say carelessly, "Oh, he's only a baby

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yet. He'll never notice what I say or do"; or, "Time enough to think of training him when he's getting older. Eight or ten—that's the time to start." Would they speak so of an animal, one wonders? Would a shepherd think it "time enough" to start training his collie when the dog was a year old? Would the kennel-master begin the education of his hounds, the rider of his horse, the sportsman of his retriever, when the animal was adult?

Every trainer of animals knows that education must begin *at once*, as early as possible. You can, if you happen to be exceptionally clever with animals, instil a certain amount into them after they pass their infancy; but such later acquirements are never *sure* as are those which have become almost as second nature. And it is exactly the same with the training of children. Habits, whether of body, mind or character, must perforce be in the process of formation during the earliest months and years; and if adopted then, will remain. Later influences may modify them, may develop or occasionally arrest them; but they will be there. No later contacts can be as effective as that early education, for they cannot in the same way be "natural" and almost instinctive. They cannot

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impress themselves on the child's whole nature with the same certainty.

Now, it is a curious fact that this is generally recognized as true as far as a child's physical habits are concerned. Any child of decent parents is trained from its earliest infancy to be clean and more or less orderly in its personal habits and conduct; but there, all too often, the education stops. It is as if, in the majority of cases, physical development were considered of more importance than the cultivation of mind or character. This cannot be the serious opinion of parents; but the truth is that the majority of them do not seriously consider the question. In honesty one has to admit that the reason why far more care is devoted to bodily education than to any other is probably this—that it is of more immediate importance to the personal convenience of the parent. Bad physical habits are unpleasant and rather disgraceful to father and mother, and so some attention is given to these external manifestations. They are inculcated by precept and example. But to mold a character is very much more difficult, for it, too, means example. And so, often, that is left on one side. "He is too young to be trained yet." "Time for character training later on." "A good school will soon form his character." So they think, and often

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say—and thus they often seal the child's whole future fate.

The clearest sign of this frequent and wicked laziness is the attitude of so many parents to a child's first attempts at self-expression—its early efforts to talk. With the child no less than with the adult, speech is a certain indication both of training and of character. An adult whose ordinary conversation is vapid, pretentious, slipshod, ill-educated, or in any way offensive or displeasing, is placed at once by his fellows. He is judged as ill-mannered, vulgar, pedantic, lazy. And it is the same with children. Their talk is quite as true an indication of their education and home. The pert child, the self-conscious child, the silly child, the precocious child, the ill-bred child—all are revealed by the way they speak and the things they say. And, in the same way, a well-mannered child, a thoughtful, or simple, or intelligent, or natural child, is known—and loved—as soon as it opens its lips to speak.

The training of a child's speech, like the molding of all its habits, is of two kinds—deliberate and unconscious. It must, that is, be both a matter of the parents' study and care, and of their own natural daily conduct. Formal fashioning is very valuable, and must always supplement the other;

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but it is of very little use unless the unconscious, constant example is also there. In the matter of one kind of speech-training, both of these are fairly general—in the case of what is commonly called bad language. There, all sensible parents not only carefully direct their children but are also watchful over themselves in the presence of the little ones. It is only the very foolish and base kind of parent who finds amusement in hearing an oath on baby lips; every thoughtful mother and father sees to it that such a painful exhibition is made impossible by taking care that their children shall never hear such talk and therefore cannot, however innocently, repeat it.

But the pity is that the training of children's speech should begin and end there. It is, of course, of first importance to teach a child never to use bad language; but it is also of importance that such teaching should be extended to include vulgar language, silly language, conventional language, boasting language, "parrot" language—in fact any language that does not express a thought in just and adequate words.

It has been seen that in the case of bad language parents instinctively, and rightly, use two methods of instruction—they train by precept and by example; and of these the second is infinitely the

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more important. A young child is, from the first, essentially and instinctively imitative. It will almost unconsciously attempt to reproduce whatever it sees and hears. All good educationists realize this and work upon the fact. They know that just *because* imitation is a natural instinct in young children, it should be turned to account. This is of the highest importance. It is of comparatively little use to tell a child "You mustn't say that" or "You should say this"; what is absolutely necessary is to let the child absorb, *naturally*, the right way to speak and express its thoughts. And the way to insure this is, obviously, to see that it never hears anything else.

It is here that environment is so important. The child will imitate the wrong as easily as the right—more easily, perhaps. His companions must be chosen with the utmost care. He must not be allowed to be much with people who speak badly. He must be trained, without his own knowledge, in those impressionable years when he will naturally and instinctively reproduce whatever he hears.

And above all he must learn from his parents. That is the natural way for a child to learn anything; it is the duty of the parents to see that they guide him right. It is in every way bad for one

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parent to have to chide a child for an expression or an accent learned from the other. If the fault is picked up from a servant or another child, it is a pity, but the parent can always say "It's wrong to say so-and-so"; it is impossible to make such a comment if the child can truthfully retort, "Daddy (or mummy) says it." So the parents must cooperate constantly; and the child's training in speech, as in the character that his speech expresses, must begin with the parents' training of themselves. They must talk, not only occasionally, not only to the child, but constantly, to each other, to other people, as they would wish to hear their children speaking. It must be continuous, this care of the tongue, or their speech will never be easy and natural, but will need persistent supervision to avoid slips which will nevertheless be sure to occur.

Too much emphasis cannot be laid on this point. The child absorbs—and should absorb—its parents' habits as it absorbs light and air and nourishment; it imitates its parents in its first endeavors to express itself and assert its own individuality. "Like father, like son"—and even more true, "Like mother, like child." The more freely, correctly, pleasantly mother and father speak, the more certainly will the child grow up from its earliest years

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to do the same; and the habit learned then will never be lost.

But the parents' responsibility, great as it is in this respect, does not end here. Not only must the child never hear loose, vulgar, uneducated expressions, bad accents, stereotyped banal talk, from its parents; they must see to it that it never hears these from any one else during those critical years while its habits are being formed. Nurse, governess, companions, all must be chosen with an eye to the effect they will have on the little one. They will leave their impression on his plastic mind and character; it is the duty of the parents to see that the effect is one that they would wish to have implanted on their child. He must never be allowed to associate with any one from whom he will pick up bad habits; and this applies to speech as it does to everything else. It applies, too, to his silent companions—the books and papers with which he will very early begin to amuse himself.

Here, as with his living associates, the parents must exercise the greatest care and discretion. The silly vulgarity of a good many periodicals advertised as "children's papers" is fairly obvious to the least discerning adult. Cheap, ill-printed, gaudily illustrated in the worst taste, their contents abounding in silly tales told in bad grammar, with

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trite, foolish expressions and commonplace sentiments—these have a ready sale among parents who yet declare that their sole aim is “to get the best possible education for the children.” No book or paper should be put into the hands of a child—especially of a young child—until it has been read and approved by a sensible and well-educated adult.

This is not, by any means, to restrict the child's pleasure in reading; on the contrary, it will very largely increase it, for by this means a permanent taste for what is best in the world of books will be instilled from the very beginning. There is a very large mass of children's literature which really deserves the name of literature—well told, happily phrased, educative in the best sense of that much-abused word, and at the same time quite as amusing and entertaining for the little ones as the trash with which they are all too often crammed.

Here again the physical parallel is obvious. No parent possessed of even a moderate amount of conscience and intelligence would allow a child to devour just any gaudily-colored, unwholesome cakes or sweetmeats simply because these were labeled “For Children.” Why can they not exercise a similar amount of prudence and discretion with regard to the food for the little ones' minds? This,

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quite as much as physical food, must be tested and proved to be wholesome, nourishing, fitting the child's needs, as material food fits its body for growth and development. Outside appearances are of as little use as criteria in the one case as the other; and the consequences of ill-judged mental food may be more disastrous and permanent in their results than the consequences of indigestible food for the body.

Enough has been written and said to prove, even to the most careless and thoughtless of parents, that the inculcation of desirable habits in children cannot begin too soon. But it is not every parent, whether careless or not, who recognizes how very desirable an asset to a child is a good habit of speech. The silly, irresponsible parent finds childish faults amusing; "quaint" is the adjective they frequently employ. Even the more sensible ones sometimes seem to consider that these faults are not serious. But to the outsider they are so; they are not amusing; sometimes they are acutely painful, exposing, as they do, a boastful, selfish, vain, or even worse type of character. And in later years, when a child goes to school or college, vulgarity or folly of speech is a definite handicap. Some good private schools will even reject a child

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on account of a bad accent or an obviously ill-educated manner of expressing itself.

Still later in life, the drawback is more grievous still. In any profession or business of standing, a good accent and cultured manner of speech are absolutely necessary, not only for success, but for immediate acceptance. It is too late then to try to eradicate faults acquired in the nursery and constantly imbibed during home life. The social conduct of the adult is based, inevitably, on the way in which the child has been brought up. The child who was awkward or self-conscious or rude in early years is tongue-tied or swaggering in the drawing-rooms which it enters as an adult; and similarly the child who has been brought up from a baby to be simple, modest, frank, well-behaved and gentle, will retain these most attractive characteristics in later life.

From this it will be plain that the parent who has a child's welfare at heart will begin its training in speech, as in every other habit of mind or body, as early as possible. The questions that such a parent will then ask are: "How shall I best succeed in this training? What features shall I encourage in his talk? What shall I try to avoid or repress?"

The means of training have already been considered. First, the child must be given such an en-

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vironment as will insure pleasant results. His surroundings, both physical and mental, must be such that bad tricks will never be learned and good habits will be easily and unconsciously acquired. He will imbibe impressions, first and foremost, from his parents. If they have an accent or a brogue, he will learn it; if he hears from them silly or coarse or meaningless expressions, he will reproduce them. After his parents, he will learn from his other companions, at home or in school; these companions must, especially during his early years, be selected with the utmost care. Finally, he will learn from childish literature, books, magazines and papers. All of these should be read by the parents before they are put into his hands in order to make sure that their contents are not only morally innocent and wholesome, but also such as will have a good effect on the developing mind that will absorb them. Let all these influences be good for the first few years of a child's life, and an admirable foundation will be laid for the future.

As to the other questions—what features to encourage in a child's conversation and what to avoid—the answer is simple. What does one most like and admire—and sometimes envy—in other people's children? Generally speaking, all people like very much the same qualities. They like natural

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childish simplicity, modesty, frankness, lack of self-consciousness. Thus the question that immediately arises is—How are these qualities to be instilled and developed?

Normally, they need not be instilled; they are dormant in the average "nice child." To develop them is, however, the parents' business; and the best—one might almost say the only—means of doing this is by letting the child talk freely to kindly and well-educated people. Let him hear good, simple, well-bred talk, and he will certainly reproduce it. Encourage self-expression; encourage a child to use, not the obvious, common phrase or word, but the exactly right phrase or word. Never laugh at a child for being "so grown-up" when he makes an effort to find the exact words to represent his ideas. If in early years he forms the habit of looking for just the right expression, that habit will remain—and how rare a gift it is!

Do not discourage originality; but distinguish between real originality and an acquired habit of silly exaggeration. This is the real test of a wise and discriminating elder, this distinction between an unusual means of expression and the foolish hyperbole that is generally picked up from a foolish adult. If a child says, "I love you as big as the world," it is making an effort to find a verbal ex-

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pression that will describe an emotion too great for physical terms; but if it says, "My new doll is as big as a house," it is not making a real attempt at expressing an idea at all; it is making an absurd comparison between two perfectly well-known physical objects. Even then, it should not be laughed at; to laugh at a child is almost always fatal if you want its love and confidence; but it should be shown, gently and reasonably, that such a phrase is silly and meaningless.

Above all, a child should be encouraged to talk freely and *naturally*. No one minds a child's prattling as long as the prattle is artless. It is only when the child becomes excited or is quite obviously talking in order to be noticed that its efforts at conversation should be checked. Children can very easily be trained to be modest and simple. To say before a child, "She is such a shy little thing," or "He's always such a bright child"—in fact, to make any open personal comment about them—is both silly and wrong. The intelligent child is quite as alert for criticisms as its elders, and it reacts to them in the same way. In fact, the more one realizes that a child is as sensitive and responds to blame or praise as readily as an adult, the more one can do towards training and developing its mind. Children are not, as many grown-

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ups seem to believe, a race apart. They have the same faculties, the same tastes, the same reactions as their seniors, and they respond to suggestion and influence far more readily.

To create a pleasant impression is one of the great gifts of childhood. Since that is so, it is distressing to find how many children do exactly the reverse. It is not the child's fault, tho it is the child who chiefly suffers: it is the fault of those who have had the training of him—of those who have either repressed him until he is foolish and awkward in society, or who have pampered and praised and flattered him until he has become pert, self-conscious and obtrusive.

Curiously enough, these foolish parents can never be brought to blame themselves for the failure of their child to be liked. "Why didn't you speak up?" they ask the shy child sharply, forgetting that, when they have been in sole charge of the little one, their constant cry has been "Don't talk so much"—"Don't push yourself forward like that." Or the even more silly parent will say, as the child self-consciously and precociously obtrudes itself, "He takes so much notice"—"She has always been such a very forward child"—and generally never notices the disgust which the little favorite's antics arouse.

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This behavior of the child in company is generally a fairly certain indication of what its conduct will be when it is grown up. Both extremes, badly as they tell against a child, result in prejudice against it even more in later life. People avoid the very shy, awkward man or woman; "He is so difficult to talk to," they say; or, "She never has a word to say for herself." They are so dull, so boring, so "heavy in the hand." But even more do people dislike the pushing, conceited, loud-voiced braggart; they regard the type with disgust as ill-bred, vain, selfish, domineering; and indeed they generally have good reason to do so. So the parent who allows a child to grow up to be either foolishly backward or conceitedly pushing in its conversation is in reality preparing for its social, and often commercial or professional, disaster in later life.

There is a remedy for this—and only one certain one. That is to bring up children so that they know, instinctively, how to speak and how to behave in company. That means, first and foremost, that the parent, on whom the child will inevitably model itself, must also know how to behave and to speak. The parent who really cares for the welfare of his child—who counts no exertion too great, no effort too trying, to assure its future welfare—will go to any trouble in order to provide

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it with this environment of culture and repose and natural ease.

It is, as a matter of fact, no great exertion, no tremendous, self-denying labor, that is involved. It means only that the father will, with the aim of helping his child, give himself one of the greatest social and personal advantages that a man can have; in order to give his child a pleasant manner of talk and the culture that inspires this, he will first give these attractive things to himself. He will cultivate his own mind in order that he may have ideas and topics for reasonable conversation; he will read widely, so that he may have a choice of good words and correct phrases in which to express these ideas; he will take care to *use* these, and to avoid the slang, the conventionalities, the banalities, with which so many people crowd their talk and which make modern conversation a hideous travesty of what that "gentle art" should be; he will learn to govern his tone and accent, so that the very sound of his voice is pleasant and soothing to the educated ear.

Growing up in this environment, constantly surrounded by cultured voices speaking well and using the best means of exchanging ideas and thoughts, the child will naturally do the same; indeed, he cannot do otherwise, since he can only

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learn to speak by imitation, and he cannot imitate what he never hears. His first baby words will be spoken with a pure accent which will double their intrinsic charm; his first sentences will be enunciated clearly and delightfully; and as he develops and begins to chatter freely, he will instinctively look for the right words, for the phrases and expressions that fit his thought—and will find them, since he hears, not a few parrot-phrases constantly repeated, but the English language finely used, with all the richness and variety that is its heritage.

Speaking easily, naturally yet correctly, in pleasantly modulated tones and a pure accent, the child's simple talk becomes a sheer delight. Every one welcomes him; and the natural ease which he has always known strengthens as his circle widens. He grows up with a *standard* of conversation—that standard which was once our boast, and which we have so unfortunately lost. His vocabulary is rich, his phrases are true and expressive; and yet he can never be accused of pedantry, conceit, didacticism, or any other of the many faults generally attributed to the "highbrow"—just because his conversation is so delightfully easy and natural. How can it be otherwise, since he has heard such

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talk all his life and has himself spoken so from babyhood?

When one thinks how great a blessing this is to give to a **child**—how easily it can be conferred, and how invaluable it must prove—one can only marvel at the laziness or blindness of the many parents who fail, utterly, to see its importance—who let their little ones pick up coarse, vulgar accents, use slang expressions, mispronounce frequently, learn no choice of word or phrase, hear and read undesirable matter—and then wonder at their failure later to impress their associates as anything but awkward, clumsy, tongue-tied louts or pushing, loud, ill-bred vulgarians. And when one remembers other children whom one has (all too rarely!) met—children whose baby talk is so pure and original and fresh—whose manners are so artless and sweet and engaging—one can only regret that so few children have had the fortune to have this precious charm developed.

The wise parent who has regard to his child's future will never neglect this feature of his training and development; and in teaching the child he will teach himself. As our sense of responsibility strengthens and deepens, surely we shall evolve a

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race of men and women who know, naturally and instinctively, how to make use of the great gift of language that is one of the treasures of the human race.

IX

The Art of Listening

IX

THE ART OF LISTENING

CONVERSATION, admitted as it is to the ranks of the arts, yet differs from the greatest arts in one respect: it cannot exist without reciprocation. A great picture may languish unseen in a garret; but it is still a great picture. There may lie hidden, unknown and unpublished, a masterpiece of music; but it is still a work of genius, even tho it has never been performed. But the art of conversation simply *cannot exist* without a listener. To the making of this, alone among the arts, there are two necessary and quite distinct halves—the art of the speaker and the art of the listener; to this, as to no other art, appreciation is necessary for the very existence of the art. There are, it is well known, certain people, generally lonely or of an abnormally shy or reserved temperament, who do in fact carry on a solitary conversation; but even in these there is at least an imaginary listener, to comment or even reply. For the art of conversation cannot, as can poetry

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or sculpture, wait for appreciation; if it does not gain recognition immediately, it necessarily sinks and dies.

The acquisition and nurture of this art is almost a necessary step in the progress of civilized life. It therefore follows that the cultivation of a habit of sympathetic listening, without which real conversation cannot exist, is equally requisite; and it is perhaps due to the fact that so many people fail to realize the importance of listening well that the art of speaking well has fallen so low in these times.

To listen well is in itself an art, and a rare art. The fact that it is fairly easy to acquire does not seem to have made its cultivation any more general: indeed, it would seem, to those who go attentively about the world, that the art of listening is almost extinct. One would think that it can present no great difficulty to those who are reasonably well-mannered to hearken with attention and sympathy to the conversation of friends or acquaintances!—and yet in a hundred good talkers there is not one really good listener.

As with every other art, so with this, there are certain qualities necessary to its full achievement, and certain common faults which are handicaps. The qualities are chiefly such as every person of good breeding will either possess already or may

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easily acquire; the faults, even tho they be common, are to be readily overcome by the exercise of a little patience and imagination.

Let us consider the factors which go to the production of that rare and delightful being, a good listener.

(I) The first necessity to a good listener is sympathy. By this is not necessarily meant agreement or compassion; the word is here used in its fullest, broadest sense, and implies an imaginative and intuitive appreciation of the nature, mind and thoughts of the speaker. We need not assent to all his views; but we must be able to understand his position, to put ourselves in his place and see with his eyes. We must not only *appear* to be interested in what he says, but must actually *be* so.

Now, to many who have suffered at the hands of bores this may seem a hard, even an impossible, task. How can one feel a real concern in the interminable chatter, the reiterations, the platitudes, the irrelevances, the long prosy periods of some of those with whom we are occasionally doomed to talk? It can be done; we may have a very lively interest even in such conversation as this if we regard it, not for its own intrinsic content, but in the light of a manifestation of a human mind. It

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is more fascinating to know about persons than about things; and so it appeals to our intellect more to know *why* a person says and thinks certain things than to know the things themselves. We have all met the type of talker who will hold firmly to a certain topic until the very name of the fetish becomes nauseous to his company. No one cares to learn about the subject; but we may, and should, be interested in the speaker and try to discover, from this preoccupation of his, some clue to the nature of the man.

Apart from this almost scientific psychological attitude, study of a speaker may itself lead us to find something worth while in the subject of which he speaks. There are some timid people who need a great amount of warm sympathy before they can bring themselves to talk at all confidentially or easily; if we can supply the necessary stimulus we are fostering the growth of conversation far more than if we ourselves spoke and allowed the nervous individual to remain silent; for we are making interchange of ideas possible, instead of setting up a monolog. Gentle, sympathetic listening will generally encourage the most timid; they hesitate at first, then thaw, until at last they are brought to speak out freely and fully. Now, this is generally of immense benefit both to speaker and listener.

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The shy, nervous person will often, if neglected, allow the expression of thought or feeling to dry up altogether; he becomes unnaturally, sometimes painfully and morbidly, repressed; he loses all confidence in his fellow man, grows suspicious, furtive, even deceitful, through his loss of mental contact with his fellows.

And yet it is often people of this very type—the retiring, self-effacing—who are most worth knowing and whose companionship is best worth cultivating. Their very shyness has turned them in upon themselves, so that they have often thought and cogitated where another has lightly spoken and lightly dismissed a subject. Within these quiet exteriors are often to be found jewels of wisdom, mined by solitary meditation; and when confidence has been won by sympathy and tact, these jewels are timidly produced and offered for appreciation. What a benefit is this to both sides! What a loss it would be, both to listener and speaker, if those thoughts never won expression! We never know, until we have tried to draw out our silent friends, that their silence may not serve as a cloak to real wisdom; and they in their turn will never speak until they are assured that our interest in them is genuine.

It is, as we all have at one time or another found,

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often a great temptation to take charge of the general conversation. This is sometimes a perfectly right and courteous thing to do. Occasions arise when, for one reason or another, a whole gathering is threatened with discomfort if it is not done. Sometimes a sudden silence descends like a pall; sometimes discussion becomes acrimonious; sometimes one of the party makes an embarrassing *faux pas*; sometimes the talk takes an unpleasant or distressing turn. In these circumstances it is the business of any tactful person with a sense of social responsibility to rescue the conversation and re-establish it upon easier, happier lines. But, in normal society, such an occasion rarely arises, and, generally speaking, one can do far more to rouse the company and obtain a free, interesting and entertaining flow of talk by sympathetically listening to and encouraging participation by others than by oneself organizing and conducting the current.

It has been said, and truly said, that interest begets interest. Of conversation, this is true in more than one sense. Sympathy with other people, even if it is at first some effort to us, eventually brings its own reward in showing us the real human person that is hidden under the most unpromising exterior. By sympathetic listening, by drawing

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out the timid, by bearing with the dull, by hearing the views and tastes of every one with whom we speak, we make for ourselves an inexhaustible store of interest—the most vivid and enduring of all, human interest. If we regard words as clues which lead to the solution of the human enigma, we shall find no interchange of thought dull, since all will lead us yet another step on the way to the solution of the riddle of human nature. And in another sense this interest will beget interest: it will beget the interest of others in us. We naturally wish to know more of those whom we like; and no one is liked so soon, so freely, so completely, as the good and sympathetic listener.

(II) The second great quality of the good listener is intelligence. Whether this is easier or more difficult to attain than sympathy depends, naturally, on the individual endowment. To the completely unimaginative man, intuitive sympathy is almost an impossibility. He literally *can not* see with other eyes than his own; he is absolutely incapable of understanding the vagaries of nature which go to the creation of other human beings very different from himself. On the other hand, the man who is naturally stupid may think that it is equally impossible to attain to mental power,

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and may scout as hopeless the very idea of acquiring it as a necessary quality to good listening. It is not really hopeless! No one is so dull but he can make himself take an understanding interest in at least a few subjects. But of course what is needed to make the perfect listener is general intelligence; not necessarily a fund of general knowledge, not even general education, valuable as this is, but the ability to listen to the conversation of others with such an alert mind that they take a real pleasure in talking to one who so much appreciates and so readily understands what they have to say—one who is eager to be informed.

Keen apprehension is the greatest of all stimulants to brilliant or profound conversation. At rare intervals we have ourselves experienced the pleasure of talking to some one who can not only understand and be interested in what we say, but who can also, by questions, comments and suggestive remarks, incite us still further—one who catches our allusions, picks up the threads of our thought readily, who provides a real flint to our steel. After the rare delight of talking to such a listener, we can appreciate the truth of the saying that "the listener is the greater half of the talk," and are better prepared in our turn to supply a

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like encouragement to the conversation of our friends.

(III) Next to these two great qualities comes one which is perhaps less rare tho no less important—the gift of patience. This, at least, is within the reach of all. If we cannot all achieve imagination and intelligence, we can all obtain, if we do not already possess, this third attribute. It is a great effort to some to listen with restraint and politeness to dull or foolish conversation; to some ardent, vivid natures it seems almost impossible to repress one's feelings as the vapid or turgid stream of words flows on; one longs to dam the flood, to cut short the infliction by an interruption, even by a snub. Yet, as all well-bred people recognize, to do this is as a rule the height of discourtesy. Only if the conversation is painful to some one else in the room, or contains statements which our conscience forces us to oppose, is such a curtailment permissible. The good listener is necessarily possessed of a fund of genuine patience—not resignation, which is a far less pleasant quality—but true kindly patience, bearing willingly with folly or heaviness or ignorance for the sake of the speaker's feelings.

The acquisition of such forbearance is possible

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to us all. The quickest, hottest temper can—and must—check itself, must learn to school itself into realizing that these unfortunate speeches are often not an indication of anything but folly at the worst or nervousness at the best, and that it is the duty of more happily constituted souls to bear with them as a strong man bears with the weak. Patience is not only a virtue—it is also a grace, the beginning of “the knightly grace of courtesy.”

(IV) After patience comes another quality which practise can bestow on all who try to attain it—the quality of attention. It is not enough to present a complacent front to those who converse with us; we must (or should, if we would succeed in the gracious art of listening well) pay them the compliment of not merely hearkening to the sound of their voices but of really *listening* to what they say, giving to their words the full heed of our minds. Those hearers who sit mute save for the occasional interjection of a monosyllable more or less (and generally less) apropos, rarely please any but the dullest of their companions. The average speaker sees at once through the flimsy pretense of attention; to him the politely bored “Really?” “How interesting!” becomes a mere rudeness (as indeed it is), and he relapses into a hurt silence.

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It is, of course, by no means always easy to pay full attention to those who speak with us. Their talk may be so dully expressed, so empty, so irrelevant, so trivial a flow of words that the mind of the hearer involuntarily wanders; and this temptation becomes increasingly powerful if, as often happens, a conversation of real interest is going on near at hand. Despite the allurements, the good listener will keep his mind firmly fixed on the discourse of his dull companion. He will force himself to *listen*—not merely to *seem* to listen—to what that companion is saying; he will try to follow the most devious narrative, the most confused argument, the most pointless anecdote, and be ready with an apposite question or remark. Sometimes this meticulous courtesy seems thrown away; but as a fact it rarely is. Very few talkers fail to appreciate an attentive hearer; and the mere fact that they know he is attentive often acts as a stimulus to their minds and produces its own reward by making the tedious flow of talk more intelligible, and even interesting, than seemed possible.

(V) Finally there is the quality of restraint. The good listener knows not only how and when to be silent, but also how and when to say a little and

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say it with a check on himself. He must learn to repress his feelings and to subjugate himself to his company; and he must do this not only by a courteous and attentive silence but also by an occasional stimulating remark or comment. He must above all learn to master himself; he must remember that conversation is the mirror of all human and social relations, and that therefore in this, as in other aspects of life, self must come last. He must curb his natural impatience with stupidity, his natural eagerness to present his view, his natural impulse to correct a false recital or an opinion with which he disagrees; and if, as sometimes happens, his conscience bids him enter a protest against some flagrantly unjust, unkind or incorrect statement, the very protest must be made with due restraint. In a word, the good listener must, under whatever provocation, retain perfect command of himself and his emotions.

So much, then, for the necessary qualities of the good listener. They include, as we have seen, both qualities of temperament and qualities of intellect; the five most important, imaginative sympathy, intelligence, patience, attention, and restraint, can, as we have seen, be cultivated and in some cases wholly acquired by the man who would learn

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this gentlest of the social arts. We shall now see what are the common faults which hinder mastery of the faculty and make some attempt to discover how they can be eliminated.

(I) Broadly speaking, the chief blemishes which prevent our listening well to the conversation of our friends are also five, of which the commonest is interruption. If one hearkens to the general run of talk in friends' houses, in trains, in shops, everywhere, it is surprising to find how very common is this ill-bred habit of striking in upon the half-finished remarks of a companion; and one knows from experience how annoying the fault is. Indeed, constant breaking in will often end in killing conversation completely.

Interruption may be due to many things; but perhaps its most common cause is a vivid, eager temperament, which is too impulsive to wait for the actual words which it expects, but leaps on the hint of what is coming and answers before the actual words are out of the speaker's mouth. Occasionally, to a very slow or inarticulate conversationalist, this kind of interruption is helpful. He does not himself quite know how to say what he means, and the intuition of his quick-witted companion clothes his thought in words for him as

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soon as he has given the hint of what he wishes to express.

But this advantageous use of interruption is very rare—so rare that it is not worth taking into consideration as against the many disadvantages which accrue to constant eager breaking in upon speech. Even the slow speaker, indeed, is more often discomposed and flustered than helped by the well-meant interpretation of his thought, and subsides into the silence from which he has just managed to struggle.

To begin with, the over-eager listener is likely to interrupt on a misconception. He does not really know how the speaker will end his sentence, but he guesses—and he cuts in to answer the statement or to question the opinion which is as yet not revealed. Frequently his anticipation is wrong, and the speaker is very naturally annoyed. Even if he has surmised correctly it is often extremely irritating to be halted in the middle of a carefully thought out line of argument or a reasoned opinion or a description of scenery or literature; and the interrupter is generally written down as ill-bred, hasty, and frequently as shallow.

There is another cause of interruption which is also temperamental. There are some people who are so nervously constituted that they cannot allow

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the conversation of their friends to flow smoothly on, but must be forever interposing with small nervous acquiescences—"Oh, I know!" "How true that is!" "I have so often thought that too," etc., etc. For a time—a very short time—this may encourage the speaker, especially if he is inexperienced; but even with such a tyro, the nervous, fulsome ejaculations will soon pall and will eventually have the effect of making him fall silent rather than undergo the constant interrupting fire of indiscriminate approval.

There are other causes, less pardonable than those of temperament, which lead to breaking in on a speaker. One of these, an all too common fault in many listeners, is pure contentiousness—the inability to agree, the desire to argue. This is all very well in its place; if we genuinely dissent from the remarks of our companions we are of course at liberty to say so; but argument purely for argument's sake is merely irritating to a reasonable speaker, and when the thread of his remarks is constantly snapped by an interruption which is prompted by combativeness alone, he may be forgiven if he relapses into silence and refuses to attempt conversation with such an ill-mannered boor. Even genuine difference of opinion should

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not be stated until the speaker has finished what he has to say.

Akin to this contentious spirit is that form of interruption which is due to a pedantic correctness. Most of us have met, at one time or another, with a representative of that most irritating class of people who will break into a carefully arranged line of reasoning to interject: "Excuse me, that was not said by Locke," or who will tear an anecdote to tatters by disputing a trivial point of date or place. These people are of the same type as those who correct the grammar of Shakespeare's finest work in red pencil, or who are worried about the exactitude of Milton's botany. They are pedants all—pedants such as the poets, from Aristophanes to Shelley, have stoned with jewels of wit. It is a cantankerous and stupid habit of mind at best; when it is employed to interrupt the flow of conversation with a petty correction quite immaterial to the general trend, it is inexcusable, and the guilty person is necessarily proclaimed one of the dreaded army of bores.

An easily diverted or distracted mind leads to another form of interruption. There are persons who, at the casual mention of a name, at the sound of a simile even, dash headlong off on a new track, caring nothing if they snap the thread of their

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companion's talk as they volubly break in to discourse on the new hare which their own flitting mind has started. There seems to be a certain type of person who is constitutionally incapable of maintaining an intelligent interest in what his companions say for more than a few seconds at a time. He must be forever changing the subject, darting off at a new tangent, pursuing new topics; never hesitating to break into what the rest of the company may be saying in his haste to introduce the new idea which has sprung up in his own feather-brain.

(II) There are other faults which prevent a man from becoming a good listener. One that is very common—and most irritating from the conversationalist's point of view—is misapprehension of what has been said. There are only two valid excuses for this, deafness or sheer stupidity. It is, however, far more commonly due to lack of attention, consequent perhaps on boredom. A hostess may find that she has, owing to the preoccupations of her position, lost the thread of a guest's remarks; or one may find that one's ear has been caught by some other talker in the room; or one has for a moment lost control of one's thoughts, which have wandered away to other subjects.

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If we realize that we have for some reason not fully grasped what our companion is saying, we sometimes do not care to admit it. We will not ask the speaker to repeat his words, and so we misunderstand what has been said, answer either at random or with obvious inappropriateness, and thus not only give the same offense as we should have done had we asked for a repetition of the lost words but gain also the reputation of stupidity. So it is far better to be frank and to own that we have not followed the gist of the conversation.

A similar course is also advisable if one finds that one's own intellectual or educational level is so far below that of one's companion that his line of thought is not comprehensible. A candid admission of one's failure to understand is seldom, if ever, taken amiss save by the irritable or the very stupid.

Misapprehension may be due to another cause. It may be that the speaker has expressed himself so badly or has spoken so indistinctly that, with the best will in the world, his audience cannot discover his meaning. Here the blame so obviously lies with him that the listener need feel no compunction in either asking him to elucidate himself or in admitting that he cannot follow the thread of the conversation.

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(III) The third common fault in listeners is that of unintelligent acquiescence. To any but a stupid talker it is irritating to have one's conversation greeted with a perpetual and quite indiscriminating agreement. If a listener *really* approves what is said, and shows, by the aptness of his comments, that it is his considered opinion that he is expressing, this is very pleasant and encouraging to the speaker; but the concurrence which is quite unreasoned and is merely given to save trouble has no excuse.

A common cause of this fault is too great submissiveness, a feeling that one's opinion (if one has permitted oneself to have such a thing!) cannot but be wrong if it is in opposition to that of the speaker. The agreement of a listener like this can rarely be pleasing save to the inordinately conceited talker, since it is seldom intelligent. No one can be interested in conversing with a companion who clearly has no true hold on what is said, but merely offers a soft, cushiony acceptance of everything that is uttered. Soothing such replies may be; but stimulating, interesting, entertaining—never. And when this uncomprehending acquiescence is (as is commonly the case) the fruit of mere mental indolence, it loses even the excuse which the charitable extend to it when they recognize it as an

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exaggerated, morbid form of humility. To agree blindly because one will not trouble to talk intelligently is only one degree less rude than paying no attention at all.

(IV) Another type of listener who is to be avoided and dreaded is the person who cannot keep his attention fixed on any subject in which he is not personally concerned. There are some people who, whatever the topic of discussion, will always contrive to bring it round to themselves, their interests, their families, their pursuits. They become absorbed and eager when their wish is gratified. When the conversation shows any signs of straying to other questions they contrive, by question or comment, or simply by showing their lack of concern in the new topic, to drag the talk back to the one subject which they themselves wish to discuss. Egotism, personal or professional, of this kind as surely kills agreeable interchange of ideas when it is displayed by the listener as it does when it appears in the talker.

(V) The last of the common faults in listeners is one generally displayed by women rather than by men—the fault of oversympathy. Beginning as it doubtless does in kindness, it too often degen-

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erates into mere gush or sentimentality; and when it does not disgust the speaker by its overdone sweetness it has the more pernicious effect of encouraging him in egotism, conceit or self-pity. It is a great gift to be able to know when to offer and when to withhold approval; but the best guide is that of sincerity.

From this brief consideration of the qualities which go to create good listening and the faults which war against it, we shall readily see that the chief requirement of the art is the gift of intelligent and appreciative silence—a gift, in these days of hurry and noise, all too rare and correspondingly precious.

The next question which the reader will naturally ask himself is, How is this gift of silence to be acquired?

The greatest and best method of learning true silence is the practise of meditation. This, which has played a great part in the spiritual life of all religions in all ages, is rarely met with in the common life of to-day. We seldom come upon those who can definitely *meditate* on a given subject for any length of time; yet it is a great gift to be able to do so. This form of contemplation means not vague meanderings of the mind, but real concen-

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tration, directed to some special object, whether actual or ideal. The power of silent and applied thought is perhaps to some of us the greatest boon which our endowment as human beings has to give us. By meditation we can rise to the height of our spiritual and intellectual nature, and so become indeed "a little lower than the angels."

The power to meditate will not come all at once. He who wishes to cultivate this gift can do so by setting aside a few minutes of each day—at first only five or ten minutes—to the silent consideration of some great subject, whether abstract or concrete, material or spiritual, and really pondering that subject as deeply as his capabilities permit. No other thought must be allowed to obtrude itself; for those few minutes the mind must be shut away from everything else and give itself up entirely to the great idea on which it wishes to concentrate. This practise will give that depth of mind, that repose of soul, which are essential to the acquisition of the gift of a silence which is not mere empty soundlessness but is both intelligent and human.

The good listener will also try to acquire a fund of human sympathy. He will study those around him, from the highest to the lowest, with the aim of learning really to *know* his kind. He will not

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assume qualities in men; he will look for evidences of their infinite diversities, trying to see and understand their handicaps, their weaknesses, their pleasures, their difficulties, their struggles—in a word, their natures.

Above all he must learn to look at them with humility, avoiding the shallowness of a supercilious or contemptuous attitude on the one hand and an exaggerated sentimentality on the other; and he must try to look at them from a human rather than a purely scientific standpoint, seeing them as men first and problems afterwards. He must, in short, try to view all mankind with that genuine respect which their very humanity should inspire.

And finally he must learn that hardest lesson of all, the lesson of self-repression. No man is naturally unselfish; but all men can supernaturally become unselfish; and the man who wishes to join the small band of good listeners must school himself so that he can, with little or no apparent effort, take a greater interest in his friends than in himself and subordinate his own tastes and desires to theirs. Not an easy task, by any means; but, apart from the pleasure that it gives to our companions to meet with such a person, the acquisition of the faculty is of a value to ourselves, to our own mental and

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moral development, which perhaps we ourselves shall never be quite able to estimate.

Apart from those qualities which are developed in the attainment of the power of silence, there are also certain personal benefits that accrue to the man who has learned how to listen.

First of these is one which too few people realize. The good talker is constantly giving out from his store of intellectual treasures; the good listener is continually adding to his. By paying close and sympathetic attention to his companions, he acquires new ideas, new knowledge, new views; his mind becomes incalculably richer. Even in conversation with those who have nothing to give him in the way of mental richness, he learns to observe his kind, and so gets a real appreciation of the infinite variety of human nature; and through this he is impressed with the great lesson of true fellow feeling.

Finally, the good listener is assured of a thing which, tho many pretend to despise, few really regard with indifference—that is, popularity. The man who knows how to be at the silent end of a conversation generally and immediately wins the favor of his companions. Few of us are really superior to being liked—we should be inhuman if we were!—and one of the surest means of gaining the

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good-will of our fellows is to be able to attend with intelligence, sympathy and interest to their conversation. The very fact that good listeners are so admittedly rare gives an added attraction to those who have acquired the faculty.

Against these notable benefits which are the reward of him who has learned to hearken well, very few disadvantages, whether to himself or to his friends, can be ranged. It might be urged that the patient, kindly listener encourages his companions to be egotistical, conceited and selfish. But the real expert at the art does not do this. He, as we have seen, guards against the excess of sympathy which leads to the mistake implied. His object is not to pander to the vanity or selfishness of others, but to draw out the best that is in them; therefore he does not encourage talk of too egotistic a kind. By the nature of his comments and replies he tactfully leads the conversation away from such subjects as narrow ambitions, physical symptoms, personal or family gossip, and puts it on to broader, more general lines. If he is the host to a gathering, he is equally skilful in subduing those overvoluble speakers who are likely to hold the floor at the expense of the rest of the company, and in drawing out those who remain silent and unobserved.

The good listener, like the good talker, should

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not carry on his avocation too eagerly. He should avoid that tense, "note-taking" attitude which flusters a nervous speaker. He should never bombard a speaker with questions. He should cultivate repose, ease, a sense of relaxation and mutual understanding.

And again, like the good speaker, the good listener should "time" his silences. He should not remain absolutely mute, but should observe moderation in his restraint; that is, he should interject occasional remarks, questions, comments, make suitable replies and observations to the talk of his companions—should, in short, show his interest in what is being said by occasionally taking a hand in the conversation himself.

As we have seen, the man who has learned silence is a benefactor both to his companions and himself. He is more than this; he is a blessing to human society. In these days of hurry and rush, of noise and bustle, there is an ever increasing demand for that repose of mind which can be given only by those who have learned to "be silent and think." We need thought more than deeds, silence more than action, repose more than bustle; and those who have learned to listen, both to their human friends and to the inner voice that tells us of secrets beyond human ken, are surely those who will benefit the world.

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Your Command of English

X

YOUR COMMAND OF ENGLISH

EXCEPT for colloquial freedom, the spoken and written languages are the same. Thus what you have learned about English composition, grammar, rhetoric, etymology, will be helpful to you in your mastering of conversation. Further studies along these lines will be doubly useful. We are here primarily concerned with talk, but aids to that will also enable you to write better and to make better addresses. Enlarging your command of good English will be advantageous to you both socially and in business. It will furthermore increase your enjoyment of the best literature. You will gain a clearer appreciation of fine writing.

What ammunition is to the soldier, words are to the conversationalist. He is dependent solely on them for the expression of his ideas. The wider his vocabulary, the more exact his knowledge of meanings, the better fitted he will be to exchange his mental store for that of his companions. It is a mistake to think that if we acquire familiarity with

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the dictionary, we shall therefore become pedantic in our speech. To have a large selection of words at command merely means that one has the power to choose the *right* (not the extraordinary) word for the right occasion. A woman who has a varied store of jewels or dresses does not therefore produce a diamond tiara at the breakfast-table, or wear the latest sports suit to an evening party; but she is able to adorn herself with exactly the proper things on any occasion.

So it is with the man who has an abundant vocabulary. He has at his tongue's end the fitting word for all needs; he can speak easily in the language of scholarship, of art, of easy banter, of salesmanship. He will not burden his intimates with the terms of scholasticism, nor will he be constrained to discuss artistic questions in the current slang of the day. He will be in command of both kinds of speech and will be able to use each to the best advantage.

Now, such a vocabulary as gives this power is not really difficult to acquire. There are two chief ways of getting it—by reading and by conversation itself. Almost every worth-while book will aid us in the mastery of words, whether by giving us new ones or by showing new ways of employing the old; and it is the same with conversation. It often hap-

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pens that by using a tool one becomes acquainted with new ways of handling it; so it is with words, and we find as we use them and hear them used, that we become acquainted with new shades of meaning and with actual new words. Knowledge brings freedom; as the great artist can employ audacious methods, so the man who truly knows his own language can afford to employ both bold turns of speech and even slang in his more intimate conversation. He will soon be able to discriminate even in the use of slang, and see that, while some is merely silly or vulgar, others of these expressions (especially those turned out by working folk, who seem to have inherited racy metaphor) have a force and picturesque quality which give them real literary value.

Such vivid phrases as "under a cloud," "never darken my doors again," are instances of slang which has passed into common and even beautiful usage; and it seems probable that a few of the best metaphorical terms in our modern life will also become embodied in this flexible and adaptable tongue of ours. The great thing is to be able to discriminate between these and the vulgar trivialities of the moment, which have no force and therefore cannot live. To be able to choose, and use, the best, both from books and slang, from friends

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and scholarship, and to add them to our store, is to provide ourselves with the rich and varied material of which a good conversational vocabulary is made.

Merely hearing a word will not always make it our very own. We can best fasten it in the memory by looking it up in the dictionary. If we consult this work to find out how to spell a word, we should read everything that is given under the heading. We should make sure of the pronunciation, of the various meanings and also the etymology. In fact, we should acquire the "dictionary habit." We should make it a rule to go to that fount of knowledge when any question whatever arises about a word. Human memory is fallible, and we do not always retain what we have learned. So a good plan is to write down the information about a given word which you have obtained from the dictionary. Thus you will help to fasten the knowledge in your mind. You can readily refer to your list at a later time when you wish to freshen your recollection.

Incidentally, if you will give attention to the origin and history of words, you will understand them better. You will also gain much curious information which at appropriate times can be made to adorn your conversation. Some words embody beautiful figures of speech. Emerson says that

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words are fossilized poetry. Some of them preserve odd customs or occurrences of the past. Did you know that "sandwich" perpetuates the passion of the Earl of Sandwich for gambling? He was so keen for this pastime that he disliked to stop even for meals. So he had a servant prepare for him slices of bread and meat which he could eat without interrupting his sport. Thus his name was given to this form of food.

"Millinery" came from "Milan"; that city was famous centuries ago for its beautiful bonnets for women.

"Bedlam" is a changed form of "Bethlehem"; this was the name of a large hospital for the insane in London.

"Salary" is literally "salt money." Roman soldiers received an allowance for salt and this finally came to mean their entire wages. There are many other words about which the dictionary has an interesting story to tell.

We shall now look at a few of the faults which are most common in the conversation of ordinary men and women. Some of these are of grammar, some of taste, some of expression or pronunciation, some of pure carelessness; but all are easily corrected.

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Grammatical—(I) Don't conjugate the verb "ought" with the auxiliary "have" or "do." That is, never say "I ought to, hadn't I?" or "Didn't it ought to be that?" The past tense of "ought" is also "ought" and the negative is "ought not"; so you should say "I ought to, oughtn't I?" or "Oughtn't it to be that?"

(II) Remember that, strictly speaking, you cannot say, "It is me," "That was him." "It" in the first instance, and "that" in the second, indicate the subject of the sentence, which must therefore terminate in "I" in the first case and "he" in the second.

(III) Don't use "like" when comparing two verbs. "Like" is used only to compare nouns or pronouns: when comparing verbs use "as." "He is *like* me," but "He does this *as* I do." To say "like he does," "like I do," is very common and bad grammar.

(IV) Never use the expression "equally as much as." "Equally" implies "as much as," and it is both unnecessary and wrong to use both. You can either say, "I like these equally well," or "I like this as much as that." You can't use both.

(V) Don't split infinitives—that is, don't interpose an adverb between the "to" and the verb in the infinitive construction. "To wholly and en-

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tirely agree," "to absolutely dislike," are examples.

(VI) Don't use the expression "different to" or "different than." One thing differs *from* another, and is therefore "different *from*" it.

(VII) Avoid the double negative. "I ain't got no dog" is so vulgar that it is readily recognized as beyond the pale. But the locution may sometimes be less obtrusive, as, "I couldn't hardly make out that word." This should be, "I could hardly make out that word."

(VIII) Beware of tautology. Newspapers often print such expressions as, "the widow of the late John Smith." If she is a widow, her husband must be dead, and "the late" is superfluous. The Authorized Version of the Bible used "widow woman," the Revised Version has dropped out the redundant "woman." You frequently read an account of the funeral or the probating of the will of "the late John Smith." Neither of those things would have taken place if the man were not dead. Why "egg omelet?" This dish cannot be made without eggs.

(IX) Your nouns and verbs should agree in number. "Those kind of mushrooms are hard to find" represents a fairly common error. The person thinks he is speaking of mushrooms and uses a plural verb. Really his subject is "kind." "That

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kind of mushrooms is hard to find” is obviously correct.

(X) “I will try and come” is a common but not desirable usage. Literally it means, “I will try and I will come.” The intent is of course to say, “I will try to come.”

Taste.—(I) Don’t sprinkle your conversation with silly and meaningless expletives. We have all heard of and derided the man who exclaimed, “My God, you have no teaspoon!” Our “Gosh,” “Golly,” “Gee,” are little better: they are now quite meaningless, and what meaning they ever had was profane.

(II) *Don’t* use very exaggerated expressions when dealing with serious subjects. Humorous exaggeration is one thing; ridiculous overstatement in grave conversation is quite another.

(III) *Don’t* use turns of speech which have a doubtful or objectionable imputation.

(IV) *Don’t* “cut in” when another person is speaking, or begin to answer his argument before it is complete.

(V) *Don’t* say, “I know what you’re going to say” when a person begins to answer you.

(VI) *Don’t* fall into the way of constantly us-

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ing one expression, such as "I mean," "You know," "What."

(VII) *Don't* get into the way of giving greater or more careful consideration to the remarks of one person than another.

(VIII) *Don't* allow your conversation to become either too brusque or too deferential. Try for a demeanor free both from servility and rudeness.

(IX) Be careful that the words you employ really bear the meaning that you give to them. *Don't* for example, say "funny" when you mean "odd" or "curious": don't say "nice" or "jolly" when you mean "exquisite," "delightful" or "beautiful." *Don't* make "sweet," "rotten," "ghastly," do the work of all the other adjectives. Think what the right word is, and use it: and don't be either lazy or cowardly.

(X) *Don't*, on the other hand, be noticeably "precious" in your language, or invent new words when there are already quite expressive terms in your own language. Don't for instance, say "vastitude" when you merely mean "size," or "sensed" when you mean "felt." There is a very bad modern habit of coining words which are neither expressive nor necessary; unless you honestly cannot

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find a word that adequately expresses your meaning, you have no need to invent.

Pronunciation.—Both the American and the English man-in-the-street will find pitfalls in their ordinary conversation in this respect. As in the matter of grammar, each laughs at the other too much and at himself too little. The American is vastly entertained by the Cockney's difficulty with aspirates and vowels; the Englishman finds plenty of entertainment in the ordinary speech of New York. Both have their special difficulties, which the following list of "don'ts" may meet to some extent; and there are in addition certain things which both should watch for and avoid. Among these are provincialisms, such as the English "had used to" for "used to," and the American "real" for "very," "cunning" for "neat" or "dainty," etc. The average Englishman also has a pitfall over vowels in this other respect: he finds a difficulty in passing from a word that ends in a vowel to a word that begins with one. Most Englishmen, for instance, will say, "Persiar is a fine country," or "Is the sofar in the right place?" because they cannot easily pass from one vowel to the other, and therefore introduce an "r" sound. The French, of course, avoid the difficulty by deliberately intro-

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ducing a "t" in such cases, as in "A-t-il"; to other races, such as the Americans and the Irish, the difficulty simply does not arise, and they find no difficulty in passing from one vowel to the other.

This paragraph will not admit of any exhaustive list of words frequently mispronounced; the man who has many doubts should provide himself with a pronouncing dictionary; but the following list will be helpful.

Do not pronounce:

Diphtheria, as Dip-theria

Genuine, as Genuine

Government, as Gover-
ment

Revolution, as Reevolu-
tion

Institution, as Institoo-
tion

February, as Febuary

Tuesday, as Toosday

Communicate, as Co-
moonicate

Arctic, as Artic

Allies', as Al'lies

Romance', as Ro'mance

Chimney, as Chimbly

Umbrella, as Umberalla

Rather, as Ruther

Far, as Fur

Biography, as Beography

Athletic, as Athaletic

Gymnasium, as Gym-
mynasium

Precipitate, as Percipitate

(and so on with many other words containing the syllable "pre-")

Some words are often used in a wrong sense. A few of the most common can be given here; but many will no doubt occur to the reader as he begins to consider his own speech and that of his acquaintances. Do not say:

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Lady, for Woman	Nice, for Beautiful
Gentleman, for Man	Gorgeous, for Pleasant
People, for Persons	In case, for If
Who, for Whom	Aggravate, for Irritate
Only, for Alone	Don't, for Doesn't
Commence, for Begin	Quantity, for Number
Mad, for Angry	Propose, for Purpose
Direct, for Address	Proscribe, for Prescribe
Without, for Unless	Apparent, for Obvious
Individual, for Person	Mutual, for Common

To define a word does not give you so accurate a grasp of its meaning as you will gain by seeing it used in its proper context. Words with a similar sound may have no resemblance in what they imply. Two words which on first impression may seem to be synonymous often have diverse significance. Study the following examples and you will have an exact understanding of a number of words which will enrich your vocabulary and thus aid you to conversational mastery.

I *consented* to let him go.
He read the document through and I *assented*.

I cannot *approve* of this scheme.
He would not *permit* the suggestion to be made.

The rise in price will seriously *affect* me.
The change of method will not *effect* any economy.

You will hear from me at a *later* date.
Of the two days, the *latter* will be the more convenient.

Your Command of English

There were four *persons* present.
A great many *people* were at the station.

I cannot *disprove* the statement.
She will certainly *disapprove* of his behavior.

This problem is very *difficult* to solve.
Breaking stones is *hard* work.

Emigration to the colonies has increased of late.
Immigration into the United States is strictly regulated.

The doctor *immolated* himself in the cause of science.
His example is one to be *emulated*.

The youth is a very *ingenious* craftsman.
The child's expression was simple and *ingenuous*.

A native professor *taught* the class.
He *learned* French at college.

The *human* element contributes much to success in teaching.
The animals are treated under the most *humane* conditions.

The artist *resumed* his work.
I *reassumed* the presidency after a brief retirement.

The bronze was the work of a well-known *sculptor*.
Paintings and *sculpture* filled the great hall.

The man *avers* his innocence.
I am not *averse* to modern methods.

The lady was *formerly* a schoolmistress.
He was *formally* presented to the Governor.

The officer *confronted* the man with the counterfeit document.
I was *affronted* by the man's behavior.

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I am prepared to *affirm* my belief in the cure.
He came forward to *confirm* my evidence.

The manager was in full *accord* with his colleagues.
A spirit of *concord* prevailed throughout the gathering.

The various intrigues *culminated* in treachery.
A politician is always likely to be *calumniated* by his opponents.

He was full of *contrition* for his misdeeds.
Nature works by *attrition* as well as by cataclysm.

Sit here and rest *awhile*.
She waited *while* I went into the shop.

He had *recourse* to a strange expedient in his difficulty.
The natives are full of *resource*, tho almost savage.

She *omitted* to say "Good-by."
The animal *emitted* a peculiar cry.

The storm will *abate* when the wind drops.
A vote of thanks served to *terminate* the meeting.

I *incited* him to get up and speak.
Evil companions *instigated* him to commit the robbery.

He gazed in an *abstracted* way across the fields.
I *diverted* his attention to what was happening close by.
The witness was *distracted* by the fire of questions.

The statement in the newspaper amounted to *libel*.
His remark was overheard and an action for *slander* followed.

The ceremony was full of *pathos*.
This descent from his former dignified speech amounted to *bathos*.

Your Command of English

Her censure of the child was marked by *asperity*.
The estrangement between the two men was betrayed by the
acrimony of their speech.

His rendering of the solo was a creditable *achievement*.
The ability to play the piano is a desirable *accomplishment*.

The boy is very *clever* at arithmetic.
My apprentice is *skilful* in the handling of his tools.

The houses *adjoin* a field.
A picture-gallery and a drawing-room *conjoin* to form a large
apartment.

She *fixed* the door so that it would not open.
I *affixed* the poster to the wall.

The clerk *attached* the document to the letter.
I *appended* my signature to the will.

The man was handicapped by his *incompatible* temper.
Her behavior was *inimical* to the best interests of the club.

Darkness makes me *apprehensive* of danger.
It is well to be *cautious* at the grade crossing.

His mother *concurred* in the teacher's suggestion.
The doctor *complied* with my request.

These are the *same* shoes that I wore last summer.
Those curtains are *similar* to our own.

The judge *mitigated* the sentence.
You might *moderate* the tone of that letter.

The child gazed in *wonder* at the heavens.
He turned round in *surprise* at the interruption.

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I place *implicit* confidence in you.
The policeman gave the man *explicit* directions.

Amidst all the noise and bustle, he remained calm.
She found her daughter *among* a crowd of people.

I quite *comprehend* your meaning.
The sound caused us to *apprehend* danger.

An Indian gave me this *antique* vase.
She wore an *antiquated* dress.

The water of the lake *looked* like glass.
The case *seemed* to me to be very difficult.

My *colleague* in the business will interview you.
His *companion* at school lived in the same locality.

There is no *connection* between these two cases.
Taken in *conjunction* with one another, the facts are *con-*
clusive.

He *arrogates* to himself whatever takes his fancy.
With your permission, I will *appropriate* this.

The urchin's *impudence* caused me to smile.
I was shocked by the man's downright *effrontery*.

That is a *lovely* bunch of flowers.
My cousin is a *handsome* man.

The butler displayed great *devotion* to his master.
The two girls had great *affection* for one another.

The appearance of the sky *portends* a storm.
The gypsy *foretells* the future.

I *admit* that I was wrong.
He *acknowledged* my claim.

Your Command of English

She *averred* that she was absent at the time.
The man *avowed* his belief in her honesty.
I *avouched* the statement of my brother.

The mayor hastened to *proclaim* the news to the people.
The gathering rose to *acclaim* the hero.

She was determined to *avenge* her mother's death.
I resolved to *revenge* myself for this injury.

His *demeanor* in the witness-box impressed the judge.
The officer's *deportment* was dignified and soldierly.

Two roads *diverged* from this point.
The tree *diverted* the course of the arrow.

Despite warnings, the man was sufficiently *daring* to bathe.
An aviator must be *fearless* and cool-headed.

A *refulgent* glow came up from the sunlit lake.
The courtiers looked *resplendent* in their gold uniforms.

Painting is a pleasant *avocation* with which to occupy leisure.
I feel that authorship is my *vocation* in life.

There is *only* one match left.
For that reason *alone*, I shall attend.

Will you please *number* these tickets?
It is necessary to *enumerate* the articles in this bag.

"How dare you do that!" he *exclaimed*.
"What?" I *ejaculated*.

The shell was delicately tinted and *translucent*.
Through a *transparent* screen we could see the interior.

I will *assign* this task to you.
The clerk was instructed to *consign* the parcel to me.

How to Improve Your Conversation

She *entrusted* the box to the boy.
The employer *trusted* his secretary implicitly.

I cannot follow that *abstruse* statement.
The yokel was rather slow-witted and *obtuse*.

It is advisable to *insure* your car.
His appearance served to *assure* me that he was genuine.

The *inevitable* result of crime is remorse.
It was an *unavoidable* accident.

The glorious prospects held out were merely an *illusion*.
She made no *allusion* to the incident in her speech.
His extravagant hopes were doomed to end in bitter *delusion*.

The *principal* of the college received us.
It was his cardinal *principle* to treat everyone alike.

The court decided that the property should be *sequestered*.
The artist lived alone in a *sequestered* valley.

He treated me with *cynical* disregard for my feelings.
There was a *sarcastic* thrust at me in his remark.

I cannot *commend* him too highly for his work.
He came to *congratulate* me on my success.

The statesman was noted for his mature *wisdom* in political
affairs.
Our headmaster was a man of wide *knowledge* on many
subjects.

I strongly *deprecate* such underhand tactics.
He sought to *depreciate* my motive in helping the man.

I could *perceive* that the witness was not telling the truth.
The teacher told us to *observe* the flowers by the wayside.

Your Command of English

He regarded me with a look of *incredulity*.

The report convinced us of the *incredibility* of the man's story.

My better feelings *impelled* me to go to her assistance.

I shall be *compelled* to reprimand him.

The citizens were *jealous* of their ancient privileges.

She was *envious* of her sister's wealth.

The adjudicator announced the *result* of the contest.

Legal proceedings were the *sequel* to the accident.

Contrary to being underhand, his action was quite *overt*.

Such shady dealings are usually of a *covert* nature.

His friendship was superficial and quite *inconstant*.

The man's utterance was surprisingly *inconsistent* with his dignity.

Captious criticism is of little value in debate.

Her behavior was light-hearted and *capricious*.

He was young, keen and *impetuous*.

The colonel rode up with an *imperious* air.

The story was *adapted* to meet the requirements of the screen.

I have *adopted* a new plan in my work.

On the hillside was a *herd* of cattle.

Down the road came a *flock* of sheep.

A *covey* of partridges rose from the grass.

On the water's edge alighted a *bevy* of quail.

The coach *oscillated* alarmingly.

Misgivings caused him to *vacillate* between the two alternatives.

How to Improve Your Conversation

Cheese contains a high percentage of *nutriment*.
The child was puny and lacked *nourishment*.

The gardener was able to *procure* me a fine specimen.
I made great efforts to *secure* the position.

Nothing disturbed the *felicity* of their home life.
He performed the task with *facility* and skill.

The absence of color left an appearance of drab *uniformity*.
We filled out the document in *conformity* with the regulation.

The ultimatum renders a national crisis *imminent*.
Several *eminent* statesmen attended the ceremony.

I *repressed* a smile with difficulty.
The general gave orders to *suppress* the rebellion.

The schoolboy was *proud* of his achievement.
Consciousness of personal beauty made her *vain*.

I tried to *deter* him from making the futile journey.
We had better *defer* this matter for the time being.

Morley's *biography* of Gladstone was perhaps his best work.
To write one's *autobiography* requires great candor.

The President moved to his summer *residence*.
My *house* is in a quiet street.

His master possessed a very *equable* temper.
We made an *equitable* division of the proceeds.

The financier's will contained several *benevolent* provisions.
A cheerful and *benignant* appearance characterized the old
man.

I *conjectured* that the financial result would be disappointing.
The child *guessed* what I had in my hand.

Your Command of English

The absence of my papers left me *idle* for a time.
The youth was *lazy* and disinclined to learn.

A journalist must possess *imagination* and resource.
In idle moments my *fancy* builds castles in the air.

The woman *immersed* the garment in the tub.
The raft was *submerged* through being overloaded.

The ocean appeared *illimitable*.
I seemed to have waited an *interminable* length of time.

Overeating does not *conduce* to healthy living.
Can I *induce* you to buy a ticket?

The clerk's services were considered *indispensable*.
A good plot is *essential* to a successful story.

The companions were *inseparable* in their attachment.
Insuperable difficulties awaited us at every turn.

The country girl was simple, *guileless* and uneducated.
The prisoner was adjudged *guiltless* and discharged.

The climate on the southern coast is very *salubrious*.
The accident served to enforce a *salutary* lesson.

The doctor was a *prominent* member of the society.
In his particular sphere, the scientist was *preeminent*.

This bread is made under thoroughly *hygienic* conditions.
The *sanitary* arrangements of the hospital are quite up-to-date.

Little boys usually have a *frank*, happy expression.
I will give you my *candid* opinion.

The lawyer was asked to *mediate* in the dispute.
To *meditate* in the quiet of the evening is pleasant.

How to Improve Your Conversation

The stranger was *implicated* in the crime.

The company is *involved* in a dispute.

We must *conserve* our financial resources.

The police endeavored to *preserve* order.

The demolition was effected by an *ordinance* of the local council.

The guns were supplied by the *ordnance* department.

He told a story that was hardly *credible*.

The student's playing was a most *creditable* performance.

These weeds must be *eradicated* before we can sow.

We *eliminated* two names, leaving three on the list.

I will give you a *practical* demonstration.

The engineer did not regard the scheme as *practicable*.

The occasion was a *memorable* one.

A *memorial* tablet was unveiled in the church.

On hearing his confession, I decided to *forgive* him.

The thief was *pardoned* by the magistrate.

I *excused* myself by saying that I had an appointment.

The lady bought the *piece* of silk.

I ordered a *portion* of vegetables with my lunch.

What would happen in such circumstances, I cannot *conceive*.

The boy could not *understand* how the sum was worked.

The scientist must be very *accurate* in his calculations.

My father took the *correct* attitude and dismissed the servant.

There was an appearance of *latent* energy about the man.

It is *patent* that I am left with no alternative.

Your Command of English

I have not the mental *capacity* to solve the problem.
A man of his *capability* is bound to succeed.

The private's devotion to duty won the officer's *approbation*.
My decision received the *approval* of my employer.

The pastor *invoked* the aid of God in prayer.
He *implored* me to let him go.

The two alternatives left me in a *dilemma*.
I am in financial *difficulty* and want you to help me.

We acted on the *presumption* that you would agree with us.
On my *assumption* of office, I shall propose the measure.

